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## Other Monumentality: Folk Memorials, Intimacy, and Public Lament

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Other Monumentality:  
Folk Memorials, Intimacy, and Public Lament

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of the Arts  
of Bard College

by  
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## *Acknowledgments*

For my grandpa Erroll—he knows all the reasons why. For our Želva family. And for my mom, who was in Želva with me. For my sister and my dad—I am forever grateful for your support. For my grandmothers, and my grandpa Alan, who introduced me to the pleasures of “art” while teaching me that it exists in endless forms.

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## ***Introduction***

Intersecting Vilnius's old town is *Zydu Gatve*, Jew Street (Fig. 1). The name stands as a trace of a centuries- old community no longer present after the Second World War. Some who survived and recall Vilna insist today's Vilnius could never be Vilna again. Between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, Lithuania's growing Jewish population orbited Vilna, today's Vilnius, and came to be known as "Jerusalem of the North" or "capital of Yiddishland" due to the city's significant Jewish population and the multi-generational culture cultivated by this community. Hundreds of shtetls, Jewish villages, circumscribed Vilna, each with their distinct community but closely knit by the capital's vitality (Fig.2). This vitality was not just religious, although Vilna's synagogues, yeshivas and, rabbis were at its core, but also civic. Since the sixteenth century, Vilna's Jewish community featured a *kahal*, a community board for the organization of social welfare. By the nineteenth century there were a number of communal bodies with the goal of social welfare assistance. The most pervasive of these community boards, Tsedakah Gedolah, had multiple initiatives, from the allotment of stipends for families to providing wet nurses to the community's orphans.<sup>1</sup> "Dormitory for the Needy Jews of Vilna," established by Baron Hirsch in 1898, was shut down in 1941 by Nazi forces, who murdered its tenants in the Ponary Forest along with at least 70,000 others and turned the dormitory into a work camp.<sup>2</sup> The structure still exists (Fig. 3). At the brink of the Second World War, Jews made up a third of Lithuania's urban population and half of every town; by the end of World War II, over 90% of Lithuania's 240,000 Jews were murdered, the vast majority in mass graves.<sup>3</sup> And still, the degree of loss exceeded

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<sup>1</sup> "YIVO | Vilnius," YIVO Encyclopedia, accessed November 8, 2019, <https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Vilnius>.

<sup>2</sup> Zvi Gitelman, "The Soviet Politics of the Holocaust," in *The Art of Memory: Holocaust Memorials in History* (Germany: Prestel-Verlag and the Jewish Museum, 1994), 139–47.

<sup>3</sup> Ellen Cassedy, "We Are All Here: Facing History in Lithuania," *Bridges* 12, no. 2 (2007): 77–85.

this immediate tragedy, as Vilna's influence went far beyond statistics or quantity. Jewish culture permeated the nation's landscape, its magnitude, represented through the sheer volume of official Jewish religious, cultural and educational institutions in pre-World War II Vilna alone. A visit today would have one wonder, since the range of Jewish culture, although there, speaks to its erasure. Along present-day Jew Street, these ruins persist if one knows where to look, from the chipping paint on the facade of a once Jewish bakery to the remains of the Great Synagogue (Fig. 4).

Vilna's reach went beyond national borders, embracing the extensive Eastern European Jewish diaspora. The city is an example of the many nodes linking this broader culture throughout the region. This was especially the case in the twentieth-century, after the founding of YIVO, the leading institute of Yiddish scholarship today and first of its kind.<sup>4</sup> Countless Yiddish-language magazines and newspapers came from and provided for this diaspora. Although YIVO partially transferred its archives to New York City, the institution itself and the rest of Vilnius's Jewish institutions were deliberately destroyed. During the war, resistance in the Jewish community took countless forms. In Vilna, a group of poets and scholars now known as the Paper Brigade retrieved what they could of piles of Jewish cultural "treasures," stolen and sorted by the Nazis, from the YIVO building and Strashun Private Jewish Library.<sup>5</sup> In one photograph, members of the Paper Brigade transport a wagon of recovered magazines and art, including a bust of Leo Tolstoy (Fig. 5). Hence destruction not only encompasses the physical extermination of Lithuania's Jewish population, but the annihilation of a vast material culture now only partially sensed in ruins. Items such as these now reside in New York City. As one of

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<sup>4</sup> "YIVO | YIVO," YIVO Encyclopedia, accessed November 8, 2019, <https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/YIVO>.

<sup>5</sup> "The Paper Brigade," YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, accessed December 9, 2019, <https://yivo.org/The-Paper-Brigade>.

the better-known institutions, the move of YIVO and other public organizations likely contributes to the perception that the culture completely disappeared in the region post-war. This perception makes sense considering the archive recalls a culture now geographically fragmented. Yet, in these fragments, a material culture persisted: adapting to increasingly intimate but nonetheless vital forms. These new forms arose from the survivors of these communities adapting to drastically different landscapes and ways of life; this intrinsically meant responding to immense loss. Thus, the memorial tradition of these communities is perhaps the primary example of their post-war material culture.

Such destruction has led to the widespread assumption that post-World War II memorialization in the Soviet Union consists only of the state's Great Patriotic War monuments. While the wartime assault on Jewish material culture, referenced in part above, naturally affected material culture post-war, those who survived mourned their communities in a tradition separate from the state. These memorials begin to appear directly after the war, and some before its official end. They continued to be built into the 1990s. This tradition precedes the state's campaign of Great Patriotic War monuments, mostly constructed a decade or more after the war. In the field of art history, scholars tend to ignore the Soviet Union in discussions about "Holocaust" memorialization because the widely known memorials of the post-World War II period are Soviet state monuments that commemorate the Great Patriotic War effort rather than genocide. While the state constructed a lot of these monuments on Jewish mass graves, memorialization also occurred locally and took on a variety of forms. Due to this locality, most people are not aware of these memorials. The majority of those who visit them do not require an explanation to know where they are. One rarely stumbles on these remote locations but rather goes with the intention of commemoration. This likely contributes to the disregard of these

memorials in scholarship. The “Holocaust” is only referenced in the Soviet Union under the guise of Stalin’s Great Patriotic War.<sup>1</sup> No word for Holocaust existed in Soviet literature and Russian. The words “catastrophe,” “annihilation” (unichtozhenie) and ‘kholokaust’ (transliterated from English) are introduced in more recent discussions of World War II.<sup>6</sup> Soviet historiography of what many call the holocaust, in this example rejects the very term “holocaust,” naturally seeped into how people now understand World War II and memorialization in the region. In Jewish studies, scholars who are aware of and have written on these grassroots memorials avoid discussing them visually. When their form is discussed, their aesthetics are often cast off as primitive and crude or reduced as merely derivative of Soviet monuments or headstones.<sup>7</sup>

In reality, these memorials varied in meanings and forms. The types of physical markers constructed were pragmatic but intentional. For some, stone or engraving was unattainable, instead wood was chosen, and in others, words were not desired. And still, in each case loss was marked by physical intervention of mass grave sites. The majority of scholarship fails to recognize this concentration of memorial activity as a broader grassroots phenomenon. Memorialization of Jewish genocide in the Soviet Union is often defined by the Soviet state’s 1976 monument at Babi Yar. This contributes to what some have called a “Babi Yar syndrome,” in which public commemoration is defined by the institutionalization of memorial activity and grounded in evoking “facelessness” or erasure of victims’ Jewish identity (but really all ethnic identity in the aesthetics of state memorialization).<sup>8</sup> Although a state policy of representing national rather than ethnic identity did develop in the Soviet Union’s Great Patriotic War

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<sup>6</sup> Zvi Gitelman, “Soviet Reactions to the Holocaust, 1945-1991,” in *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union*, ed. Lucjan Dobroszycki and Jeffrey S. Gurock (London, England: M.E. Sharpe, 1993), 3–27.

<sup>7</sup> Gitelman.

<sup>8</sup> Arkadi Zeltser, *Unwelcome Memory*, trans. Brown A.S. (The International Institute for Holocaust Research, 2018).

commemoration (seen in the broader output of material culture from public sculpture to cinema), this trend should be seen as a response to an already existent grassroots culture of remembrance occurring locally across the Soviet Union well before monuments such as the State's Babi Yar were imagined.

Only in recent years, Arkady Zeltser has quantified this concentration of grassroots monuments in the Soviet Union, finding a total of 733 monuments in the USSR made between 1945 and 1989.<sup>9</sup> Zeltser, acknowledging that in many cases monuments were executed by a combination of local and state actors, only includes monuments made by "Jewish Memorialization Groups." It is significant that these were "Jewish" only in their localization and "groups" in that this desire was active rather than passive, taking into account the financial and legal factors of monument making that required collaboration. Acknowledging the grassroots surface underpinning memorialization of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union complicates the nature of monuments established by Babi Yar and requires a different framework. One must note that the state's Babi Yar monument was a response to calls for memorialization in public discourse by Soviet artists using Babi Yar as the subject in their work. These artists, all non-Jewish, were unaware of the already existent memorial culture, likely because these grassroots memorials were highly localized.

These memorials, at coinciding mass grave sites, are what I am calling "folk memorials." A folk memorial is *something* made and funded by individuals, commemorating death in space. Often it is in the form of a structure, but also a ceremony, object, etc. They exist at secluded sites and are modest in scale. This differs from Soviet state memorials, which demand broad viewership and are monumental, highly visible, and often at populated sites. In the Soviet Union,

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<sup>9</sup> Zeltser.

public is synonymous with state, which organizes all public commemoration. I have qualified folk memorials, particularly “in space,” to emphasize they exist in that which is “free or unoccupied.”<sup>10</sup> The makers of folk memorials are specifically individuals, even when organized, because they are acting outside of the state. Folk memorials exist in communal spaces to create a public sphere within the broader public. That being said, it is essential to understand—their makers specifically situate them on the periphery of the broader public to do so.

Understanding folk memorials within the context of folk art reveals the underlying methods facilitating this widespread grassroots practice. Folklore is the amalgamation of culture produced by a particular group, and folk art is their material culture. The *Art and Architecture Thesaurus* defines folk art as art “produced in culturally cohesive communities or contexts” and “in accordance with mutually understood traditions.”<sup>11</sup> The memorials at hand were produced in a highly cohesive socio-political context, by a culturally unified diasporic community. Yet, their producers were not guided by any particular rules or procedures so much as creating under specific conditions: intimate communities, responding to a distinct tragedy. In this context, the folk is a body of culture created within the arena of a counter public. Thus, folk memorials engage in processes of public formation.

While monument and memorial are terms that tend to be used interchangeably, a dialectical opposition between them must be observed in identifying folk memorials. Monuments are one kind of memorial. The monument, a marker at a site for a meaning or event, functions within the logic of representation and marking.<sup>12</sup> Memorials also tend to operate within this logic, grounded at a place, marking its meaning through representation. Yet, a memorial is not

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<sup>10</sup> “Space | Definition of Space by Lexico,” Lexico Dictionaries | English, accessed March 6, 2020, <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/space>.

<sup>11</sup> Joan M. Benedetti, “Words, Words, Words: Folk Art Terminology—Why It (Still) Matters,” *Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America* 19, no. 1 (2000): 14–21.

<sup>12</sup> Rosalind Krauss, “Sculpture in the Expanded Field,” *October* 8 (1979): 31–44, <https://doi.org/10.2307/778224>.



necessarily a structure. All memory-sites are memorials, such as a day, conference, space, or monument.<sup>13</sup> The entity need not be material, such as a tangible monument, to activate memory through symbolic elements. In *Sculpture in the Expanded Field*, Rosalind Krauss describes the monument as mediating between “actual site and representational sign,” its “negative condition” thus “sitelessness.”<sup>14</sup> Memorials are inherently self-referential and do not require objectness or a physical site to embody particular memory.<sup>15</sup> For the memorial, meaning resides particularly in marking memory, which is inherently siteless. The folk memorials of this project do tend to be at mass grave sites, but the vast majority solely exist in photographs which independently function as memorials: mobile while continuously embodying the memory of people and/or place.

I have located three types of folk memorials: the fenced memorial, figurative memorial, and temporal memorial. These categories often overlap, with the aesthetics of more than one type sometimes used at a single site. For example, a fenced memorial may surround a figure, or a temporal memorial might incorporate figuration. The fenced memorial, often a fence surrounding a plot of land, physically marks a public within a public. The fence creates a sovereign zone: a territory that does not belong to the state in a place where all land, such as the forest, is common besides for those that are not. The fence creates sovereignty within this common space, normally the state’s territory. Figurative memorials provide this counter public with a symbol. This symbol is a mother figure, particularly weeping. Yet, she is not the mother of god. She is simultaneously the *rodina*-mat, mother motherland, though more intimate than traditional depictions, and biblical Rachel, mother of Joseph and Benjamin. An act of symbolization, this hybrid mother figure emerges as an emblematic container for a Jewish

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<sup>13</sup> James Edward Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2000).

<sup>14</sup> Krauss, “Sculpture in the Expanded Field,” 1979.

<sup>15</sup> Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,” *Representations*, no. 26 (1989): 7–24, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2928520>.

counter public. Temporal memorials, on the other hand, generate publics through experience, often in the form of ceremonies, but also wooden objects/structures. For the latter, meaning lies within the chosen medium: wood's fleeting materiality. All question the role of intimacy in memorials. In folk memorials, intimacy resides in public space and fits into processes of memorialization. Their intimacy is their creation, but it also contributes to their obscurity.

Always in addition to these types and their meanings is the omnipresent photographic element, unavoidable because the vast majority of memorials at hand no longer exist beyond a singular print or negative. To assess each memorial type, one mostly relies on photographs of them. In many of these photographs, visitors pose next to a memorial structure. A final chapter on these photographs looks at the act of deliberately framing bodies (or not) in relation to a given site and the photograph as a memorializing object in its own right. What I am calling the "photographic memento" creates a traveling memorial, existing as an heirloom of a particular memory. In many cases, such as those made of wood, makers seem to have been aware of their creation's temporality and perhaps used photography for this reason. It is also possible makers or visitors were fearful of memorials being desecrated or that they themselves would soon be banished, or photographing in case unable to return. Yet, neither account for the broader practice of photographing a wide range of memorials, from inherently fleeting ceremonies to structures built with the most permanent of materials.

Stalin's anti-cosmopolitan campaign perpetuated the erasure of Soviet Jewish culture and contributed to the peripheral nature of these folk memorials. In 1946, Stalin gathered Soviet intellectuals to assess the state of Soviet art, music, literature, and theater. In his speech, Stalin calls "all things foreign and cosmopolitanism" the oppressor of the "positive Soviet hero."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> "Stalin On Art and Culture," accessed December 7, 2019, <https://www.northstarcompass.org/nsc0306/stalin.htm>.

Stalin carefully excludes the word Jew from his speech, but his audience knows he speaks of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (JAC). The JAC was initially established by the Soviet state and Jewish Bund labor union during the first year of Nazi occupation and consisted of Jewish cultural figures, the majority of them actors and writers. Stalin appointed actor and director of the Moscow State Yiddish Theater, Solomon Mikhailovich Mikhoels, chair of the JAC, and during the war, Mikhoels lectured and met with officials in America, Britain, Mexico, and Canada about the Soviet effort against Nazi Germany.<sup>17</sup> The JAC's originators, two Jewish Bund members, were arrested not even a year after the committee's inception for attempting to collaborate with Jewish socialist groups (particularly the Polish Jewish Underground) in forming a political bloc against Germany.<sup>18</sup> The Soviet state intended for the JAC to function as a propaganda vehicle, specifically drawing Western endorsement and material support for the Soviet Union. These moves by the JAC exhibited a degree of sovereignty from the state and its objectives that was controversial. Establishment of an independent but international political network, especially along ethnic rather than national lines, challenged Soviet leadership.

After the war, the JAC committed itself to recording Jewish genocide. The most significant effort on behalf of the JAC is undoubtedly *The Black Book of Soviet Jewry*, a monumental compilation documenting Jewish genocide and Jewish resistance movements during the Second World War. In 1942, a subcommittee of the JAC began archiving material on Nazi crimes against Soviet Jews and related victim testimonies for what would become *The Black Book*, and the following year chairman Solomon Mikhoels traveled back to the United States to announce their intention to publish such a work.<sup>19</sup> Many proposals were made, most notably by

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<sup>17</sup> "YIVO | Mikhoels, Solomon Mikhailovich," accessed December 7, 2019, [https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Mikhoels\\_Solomon\\_Mikhailovich](https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Mikhoels_Solomon_Mikhailovich).

<sup>18</sup> "YIVO | Erlich, Henryk," accessed December 7, 2019, [https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Erlich\\_Henryk](https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Erlich_Henryk).

<sup>19</sup> "YIVO | Black Book," accessed December 7, 2019, [https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Black\\_Book](https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Black_Book).

Albert Einstein and the American Committee of Jewish Writers, Artists, and Scientists, but the final version was a collaboration between Soviet Jewish authors Ilya Ehrenburg and Vasily Grossman. Although the Central Committee Department of Propaganda and Agitation initially approved and began printing 50,000 copies of *The Black Book* in 1947, Glavlit (Soviet censorship agency) halted publication two months later due to the book's "grave political errors"; it was not published in its entirety until after 1989 by the Vilnius publishing house Yad.<sup>20</sup> Mikhoels, attached to the project from the start, appealed for the book's publication. The project was significant because it contains testimonies and statistics that were not publicly available at the time. This information contradicted Soviet policy of the Great Patriotic War, which understood the events as genocide of Soviet citizens rather than any ethnic group in particular. The following year, while traveling in Minsk with the Yiddish Theater, Mikhoels was murdered by the Ministry of State Security under Stalin, who subsequently liquidated the JAC.<sup>21</sup> Now, given this historical context, one can locate the pointed undertones of Stalin's 1946 speech; he denounces "cosmopolitanism" and all things "foreign" because they risk forming other affinities beyond the state. Exhibiting sovereignty in decision making, as evidenced by the JAC's demise, was interpreted as anti-patriotic and a threat to the state. In 1949, countless Soviet newspapers published articles condemning prominent Jewish theater critics and other Jewish cultural figures and accusing them of being cosmopolitans and foreigners. While some non-Jews were also accused of cosmopolitanism, over seventy percent of the figures exposed in the press

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<sup>20</sup> Antonella Salomoni, "State-Sponsored Anti-Semitism in Postwar USSR. Studies and Research Perspectives," *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History*, no. 1: Focus (April 2010), <http://www.quest-cdecjournal.it/focus.php?id=212>.

<sup>21</sup> Rubenstein Joshua, "The Night of the Murdered Poets," *The New Republic*, August 25, 1997, <https://web.archive.org/web/20070827145945/http://www.joshuarubenstein.com/stalinsecret/intro.html>.

between February and March of 1949 were ethnic Jews.<sup>22</sup> The initiative grew into a systematized purging of Jewish culture on multiple counts. After the murder of Mikhoels, the state removed his Yiddish verse from the iconic scene in *Circus* depicting people of various Soviet ethnicities singing a lullaby.<sup>23</sup> The campaign began with Mikhoels's murder and consummated in what many refer to as the "Night of Murdered Poets." Fifteen Jewish figures, a majority of them Yiddish writers and all connected to the JAC, were arrested and tried on multiple charges. In 1952, thirteen of the defendants were found guilty and executed at Moscow's Lubyanka prison. Of the remaining two, one was exiled while the other collapsed during the trial.<sup>24</sup> Stalin's anti-cosmopolitan campaign marked for Soviet Jews a new iteration of persecution that likely pushes their activities into the periphery. Simultaneously, this contributes to the widely held misconception that Jewish culture in the region ceased to exist altogether.

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<sup>22</sup> "YIVO | Anticosmopolitan Campaign," accessed December 7, 2019, [https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Anticosmopolitan\\_Campaign](https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Anticosmopolitan_Campaign).

<sup>23</sup> НАИЛЯ КЯЗИМОВА, "Фестиваль Еврейской Темы: О Чем На Arbuzz J-Fest Рассказывали Колбовский, Юзефович, Федорченко и Улицкая," *ZIMA Magazine*, March 4, 2019, <https://zimamagazine.com/2019/03/arbuzz-j-fest-konspekt/>.

<sup>24</sup> Joshua, "The Night of the Murdered Poets."

*Introduction: Figures*



Fig. 1. Žydu Gatve, Vilnius, Lithuania, 2019 (Photograph by Gabriella Goldberg)



Fig. 2. "Shtetl Map," map, Lithuanian-Jewish Special Interest Group, April 2019, accessed December 9, 2019, <https://www.litvaksig.org/research/map>.





Fig. 3. Structure of the former Dormitory for the Needy Jews of Vilna, Vilnius, Lithuania, 2019 (Photograph by Gabriella Goldberg)



Fig. 4. Poster at the site of the once Great Synagogue, Vilnius, Lithuania, 2019 (Photograph by Gabriella Goldberg)

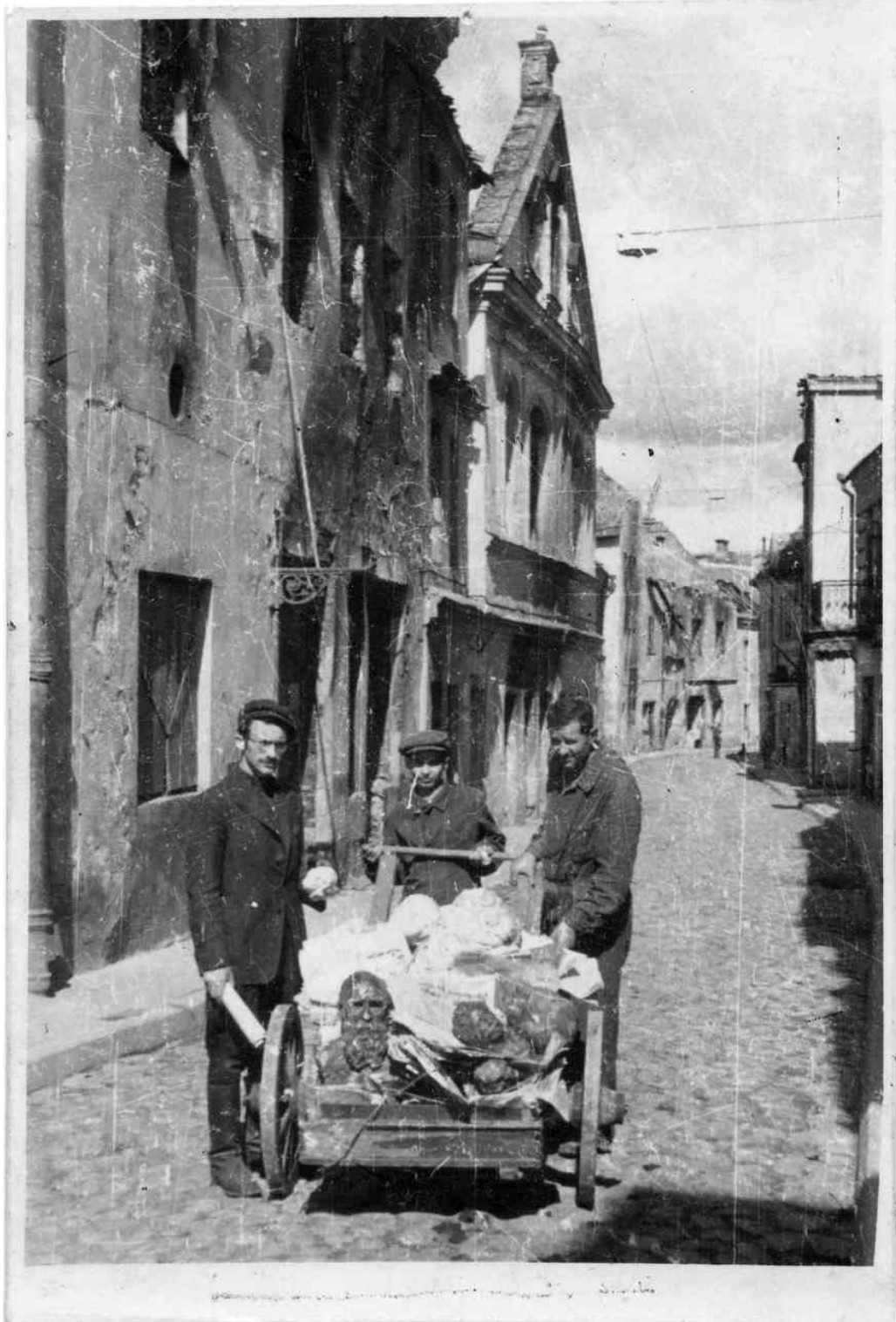


Fig. 5. The Paper Brigade with a wagon of recovered newspapers and artwork, including a bust of Leo Tolstoy, July 1944. Vilnius, Lithuania, (YIVO Archives), <https://www.yivo.org/The-Paper-Brigade>.



## ***I. Fences as Form***

Two women stand outside a low metal fence in the middle of a forest (Fig.1). Both look straight into the camera aware a photograph is being taken. The frame is consumed by trees on all sides, but foliage does not conceal the fence. Inside the fence are more plants, resembling an overgrown garden, but we are told this is “a monument” in Vilkaviskis, Lithuania.<sup>25</sup> Perhaps another object lies beneath the brush, but if so, why wouldn’t the photographer or their subjects reveal it?

This photograph, taken in the forests of Vilkaviskis, shows a mass grave of 3,056 persons. The German army occupied the shtetl of Vilkaviskis in June, 1941, immediately bombing the synagogue and a number of homes, and relocating Jews to a ghetto just outside town.<sup>26</sup> By July, all men were murdered on site in one of two pits; the women and children followed at the same location in September. Like the majority of local massacres in the Soviet Union during World War II, death occurred at or close to home, often in nearby forests because it was convenient: close, hidden, and spacious enough to execute genocide swiftly.

Comparison with other images of mass murder sites in the Soviet Union during this period reveals a significant relationship between the built fence and memorialization of both genocide victims and sites. Given the persistent bond with a particular site, the act of memorialization is not only rooted in memory of a particular community but also location. In nearby Seta, Lithuania, a similar metal fence encircles a concrete plaque engraved with “Victims of Fascist Terror” in Yiddish, Lithuanian, and Russian (Fig.2). Three men stand inside the fence, two behind the plaque and one to its right, all looking directly at the camera. Like the photograph

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<sup>25</sup> “Vilkaviskis,” accessed February 7, 2020, [https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item\\_id=90370&ind=0](https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item_id=90370&ind=0).

<sup>26</sup> “The Holocaust in Vilkauskis,” accessed February 7, 2020, [http://www.jewishvilkaviskis.org/The\\_Holocaust\\_in\\_Vilkaviskis\\_.html](http://www.jewishvilkaviskis.org/The_Holocaust_in_Vilkaviskis_.html).

in Vilkaviskis, the subjects are also aware of their picture being taken. In both images, subjects position their bodies in relation to a particular site, delineated by a fence that is low enough to the ground for one to step over it. Though the fence in Seta surrounds a plaque describing the location in words, this does not necessarily mean that a plaque also exists in Vilkaviskis beneath the brush.

Broadly speaking, fences mark. In a memorial context, this marking is used to various ends. Fences often mark territory, even outside a memorial context. In the Soviet Union, where most lands, such as the forest, are common, some fenced memorials mark a territory as separate from the rest of national territory. While not functionally, these memorials symbolically mark a sovereign space within public space that does not belong to the state. By doing so, the fenced area simultaneously mimics its conditions within the broader public. In other fenced memorials, fences act as frame for symbolic representations to be perceived outside of their usual context. For example, the monument in the forest in Vilkaviskis is comprised of trees and a fence. These trees are in their usual context—the forest. Trees in a forest do not independently represent anything beyond their actual setting. Likewise, a forest with trees of various size is not out of the ordinary. Yet, when these trees are framed by a fence which outlines a mass grave, they merge into a monument. The fence marks a part of the forest for the commemoration of those buried beneath it. By choosing and allowing a part of the forest to grow higher than the forest outside the fence, the memorial accentuates the presence of the deceased at the marked site and relates them to this growing portion of earth.

Fences obstruct space to mark that which is off limits. Sometimes fences are used in memorials for solely protective purposes, shielding a primary structure from looting or defacement. Yet, fenced memorials often use obstruction didactically, as a means of mapping out

the memorial's intended path. In such cases, the fence is a formal feature of procession for the purpose of inspiring a set of deliberate commemorative acts. For example, some fences compel mourners to circumscribe or walk through a site before reaching a central structure. These fences encourage contemplation of a site and its significance before prayer at the primary structure; or perhaps they compel visitors to pray while moving throughout the site. Either way, the fence produces certain acts. Other times, fences block viewers from reaching a structure. In both cases, the fence is intentionally used as a tool for obstruction.

### **Demarcating Loss**

Fenced memorials do not always use traditional fence forms or materials. Oftentimes, their boundaries are flimsy. Besides providing protection, fences also demarcate property. Following this logic, these fences make property out of common land to memorialize loss. For example, a memorial in Maziėkiai, Lithuania uses a short concrete and metal fence to delineate a mass grave (Fig. 3). The fence is low enough for one to step over, but high enough to visibly mark the site. The photograph portrays two women inside the fence, touching a concrete structure. Surrounding the fence are the high trees of a forest. This fence, unable to physically obstruct visitors from going inside, marks a symbolic sovereign space. In the context of World War II, sovereignty is related to nation and state, creating distinctions between internal and external, national and foreigner.<sup>27</sup> Thus sovereignty relies on the delineations of territory. The Jewish communities of the former-Russian empire lived in the Pale of Settlement, a territory of

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<sup>27</sup> Dieter Grimm, "External Sovereignty," in *Sovereignty: The Origin and Future of a Political and Legal Concept*, trans. Belinda Cooper (New York, New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 77–98, <https://doi.org/10.7312/grim16424.8>.

the Empire Russia designated for Jews from 1791-1917.<sup>28</sup> For the Jewish communities that were denied sovereignty and which were ultimately persecuted based on xenophobic accusations, symbolizing sovereign space is significant because it expresses their desire for autonomy; it simultaneously references itself because the memorial is a space created for independent, self-governed mourning.

The vernacular fence, constructed with posts and made of wood, stone, or wire, was just one way of physically marking space for a metaphysical objective. For example, an earthen embankment outlines a mass grave in Bar, Ukraine (Fig. 4). A white obelisk stands at the center of the embankment surrounded by four raised plots, only accessible by a bridge and door sandwiched between two white columns. The three raised plots, inscribed with “Soviet Citizens,” likely identify the pits where bodies were burned, a prevalent Nazi practice throughout the Soviet Union. A similar effort to emphasize these pits were made at the Ponary Forest in Vilnius, where memorial activists erected stone borders. The below-ground moat and upright mound simultaneously function as a fence because they establish a boundary, between in and out; the latter referencing the Ukrainian-Jewish funerary practice of surrounding cemeteries with earthwork.<sup>29</sup> The artificial stream of water surrounding the earthwork not only marks space, but successfully obstructs visitors from entering the domain before reaching the door (unless one chooses to get wet). An expansive field fills the photograph’s frame, the raised embankments disrupting the uniform landscape like a ripple in the earth’s surface: a firm demarcation of common land. Such a manipulation of the natural world evokes power and control, a striking juxtaposition on the burial ground of those made powerless.

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<sup>28</sup> “Pale of Settlement,” YIVO Encyclopedia, accessed April 22, 2020, [https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Pale\\_of\\_Settlement](https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Pale_of_Settlement).

<sup>29</sup> Zeltser, *Holocaust Monuments in the Soviet Union*.

## Framing Symbolization

In Skuodas, Lithuania, a low fence encompasses a path and three steps leading up to a rock slab, split in two and installed vertically (Fig. 5). The fence cannot physically obstruct people due to its height, but is high enough to noticeably mark the site from a distance. A dedication in Lithuanian and Yiddish describes the eight-hundred Shkud citizens murdered and buried at the fenced site alongside “the wound will never heal.” The halves are held together by a metal Star of David, making it difficult not to associate the broken tablet with such a wound. The only way of accessing and ascending the stairs is by stepping over the fence, which requires a degree of confidence and intention, especially if one is aware of what the fence delineates.

Inclusion of steps ascending to a pinnacle focal point recalls approaching a bimah, the platform or pulpit in Jewish synagogues, which is always raised, and often by two or three steps.<sup>30</sup> The rock’s shape further alludes to the bimah because it is split in two, resembling the tablets of the ten-commandments, often similarly placed atop the bimah, and its upright position echoes the vertical arrangement of the Torah in most synagogues. Creating an association between the site and sacred space aligns victims with sacrifice and martyrdom, memorialized as heroic rather than passive actors. The latter, passivity, is a prevalent critique of Soviet Jews during Nazi occupation. The decision to aesthetically detach victims from stereotypes of passivity is reinforced by the broader concentration of participation in grassroots memorial activity post-occupation. The fence, while seemingly secondary to the central rock slab and its meanings, frames these symbolic representations to be interpreted in its forest setting. One of the only universal attributes of the synagogue is the bimah, a raised platform representing the altar. Worshippers stand on the bimah to read from the Torah. Because all synagogues contain one, the

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<sup>30</sup> Joseph Gutmann, *The Jewish Sanctuary*, vol. 1, Iconography of Religions, XXIII (BRILL, 1983).

bimah is closely associated with architecture. In the Torah, altars are sometimes outdoors, but few existed contemporarily outside of an architectural context. In order to simulate an experience of this particular religious building in nature, the memorial relies on the otherwise peripheral characteristic of the fence. The fence and steps, in suggesting architectural space, renders the rock in a synagogue context and in turn, signals the memorial's symbolization of a bimah. Ultimately the fence assists the symbol to be interpreted as a bimah in an otherwise foreign spatial context.

Other times, fences distance the objects they contain from the memorial's setting for the purpose of symbolization. A photograph taken in Sviencenelai, Lithuania is said to depict "a monument at a site where 44 Jews were murdered" (Fig.6).<sup>31</sup> From afar, the image depicts a rock on the forest floor. The rock is the most exposed part of the image, bright white and at the center, in stark contrast to the ground on which it lays. Yet, darkly lit at the top of the image is the bottom of a wooden picket fence. Picket fences, usually used for domestic boundaries, often surround dwellings. A picket fence in and containing only the forest is quite uncommon. A rock on the forest floor, on the other hand, is not unusual and far from suggesting "a monument." Yet in combination, this rock and fence are installed to memorialize forty-four people. Framed and thus accentuated by the fence, this individual rock may symbolically represent something else, outside of its usual existence in nature. This rock could represent many things, and little information exists on this particular memorial to determine what it connotes. Yet, in a Jewish funerary context, placing a stone on a grave is a common practice. When a grave is unmarked, the fence designates the site of a grave and places the rock on top of the ground in a funerary context. As a memorial, the fence and the rock together symbolize the proper graves these forty-

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<sup>31</sup> "Sviencenelai, Lithuania," Yad Vashem, September 27, 1991, [https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item\\_id=863&ind=0](https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item_id=863&ind=0).

four deceased persons were denied. The fact that it is one large rock, rather than small stones individually placed at tombstones, suggests its collective function: a memorial to multiple people, rather than an individual grave.

## **Obstruction**

Fenced memorials oftentimes utilize the fence-form as a method of reception. This is accomplished by using fences to block space in a manner that controls the order and way visitors move through the memorial. Fences often obstruct and force bodies to move in a specific way in order to see or move beyond the fence. Most definitions of “fence” include “barrier” and “protection.” In many cases, such memorials experienced defacement. Hence fences are used preventively, to protect memorials from destruction and vandalism. Yet, other fenced memorials use the fence to obstruct, not for the sake of protection, but rather of boundaries. Here, memorials symbolically reserve a domain for certain activity.

A photograph taken at a memorial in 1946, in Pikov, Ukraine depicts an expansive fence with a door parallel to an obelisk (Fig.7). Above the door is an arch topped with the Star of David. Visitors enter through this door and must choose to proceed down a path to their left or right, both reaching a black obelisk halfway. A group of visitors look to the camera positioned several feet outside the gate. In the distance are several buildings, presumably homes. Nazi forces occupied Pikov in 1941, establishing a ghetto for a short period before shooting and burying the population in three mass graves between May and June the following year. The fence built on the road to Pikov (pictured in the distance) outlines this mass grave. This memorial’s fence resembles a building more than the other fences in this chapter. The fence is tall, with an established entryway, and inside the fence is a path, somewhat like a hallway. The photographed

path encircles the grave site, forcing visitors to circumscribe it. In this sense, the memorial also functions similar to a building because one proceeds through a door and down paths in order to move through it. Viewed from inside the memorial, the fence resembles walls because it is tall, actually able to provide security, and it surrounds the entire space. Visitors commemorate loss by moving through the space in a prescribed order at the physical site of tragedy, ritualizing observance. In this case, photography provides evidence of spatial practices. Here one sees viewers at different stages in this procession.

Obelisks at mass graves of this kind are often enclosed by a fence, but do not always have a door. In Kharkov, Ukraine a small metal fence surrounds a stone obelisk (Fig. 8). In contrast to one in Píkov, this fence closely surrounds the central structure and acts as a boundary that encourages isolated visual observance of the obelisk by hindering movement and touch. Is this obstruction an intentional formal feature? Or is this an example of the fence obstructing for protective purposes, for example, from defacement? The structure in Kharkov similarly includes a Star of David, but it is painted on its side, not casted or used as a crowning ornament. Still the star is used in both cases as a way of signaling the frontal view. No people are shown in the Kharkov photograph, which may not mean anything or could suggest that this structure was meant to be viewed rather than interacted with physically. If so, is this for the sake of a desired experience or the obelisk's protection?

## **Conclusions**

Here fences are used in memorials to express values, symbols, and evoke particular acts of mourning. Approaching the fence as a formal feature reveals other meanings. Solely questioning that which lies inside the fence is a far more frequent method which produces



limited interpretations. For example, when a fence in the forest contains only a rock or more forest, the fence is almost required to register or experience the memorial as such. Ignoring the fence makes it difficult to register the fenced rock or forest as intentional which leads one to look past their significance. When fences contain structures, these fences are similarly disregarded because the structures tend to be in more traditional monument form, particularly obelisk. Solely assessing the structure inside the fence limits the memorial to classic interpretations of these traditional monument forms. As a result, one overlooks the values, meanings, and acts produced by the fence. These structures are just one part of the memorial, in addition to the fence. Use of the fence to create an environment is unique to these folk memorials and ultimately that which informs on the practice. But to recognize the practice, one must perceive these environments in their entirety, as a combination of the fence and what it contains.



Fig. 1. A monument, postwar, Vilkauskis, Lithuania, (Yad Vashem),  
[https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item\\_id=90370&ind=0](https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item_id=90370&ind=0).

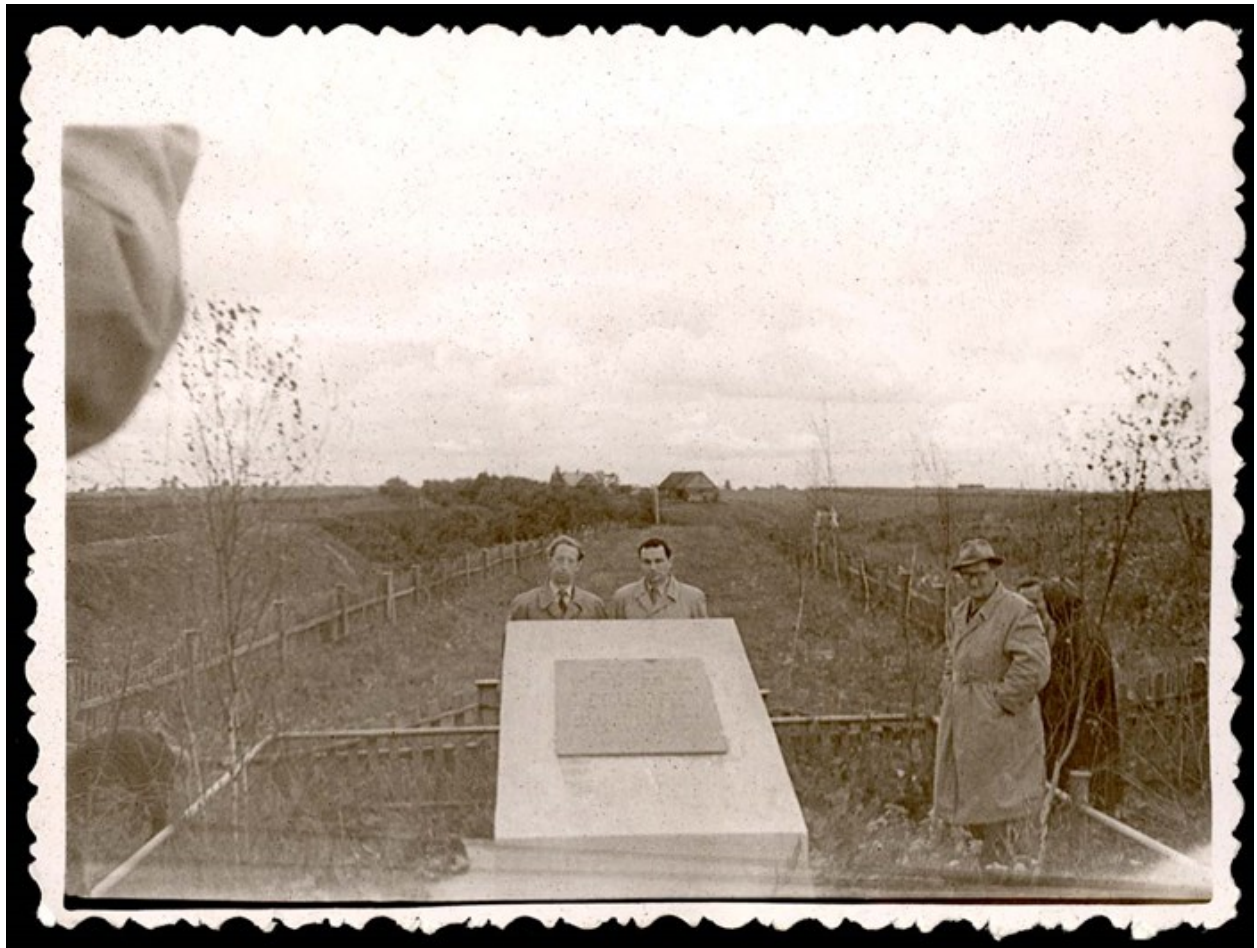


Fig. 2. A monument to those who perished in the Holocaust, Seta, Lithuania, (Yad Vashem), [https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item\\_id=53945&ind=0](https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item_id=53945&ind=0).





Fig. 3. A monument to the town's Jews, Maziėkiai, Lithuania, (Yad Vashem),  
[https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item\\_id=3415&ind=0](https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item_id=3415&ind=0).



Fig. 4. A memorial site with a monument, 1964, Bar, Ukraine, (Yad Vashem),  
[https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item\\_id=20601&ind=3](https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item_id=20601&ind=3).





Fig. 5. A monument at a site where 800 Jews were murdered, Skuodas, Lithuania, (Yad Vashem), [https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item\\_id=34481&ind=0](https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item_id=34481&ind=0).



Fig. 6. A monument at a site where 44 Jews were murdered, Sviencenelai, Lithuania, (Yad Vashem), [https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item\\_id=863&ind=0](https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item_id=863&ind=0).



Fig. 7. A Monument to Jews Massacred on 05/30/1942 erected by local Jews, 1946, Pikov, USSR, (Yad Vashem), [https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item\\_id=27261&ind=0](https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item_id=27261&ind=0).



Fig. 8. A monument to the 20,000 Holocaust victims from Kharkov, Kharkov, USSR, (Yad Vashem), [https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item\\_id=59075&ind=0](https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item_id=59075&ind=0).

## II. *Mother Figures*

Figurative memorials almost always depict women. And not just any image, but a particular sullen woman. Such female figures frown or weep alone, without other figures present. These memorial sculptures are often in the form of a single carved material, whether a monolith, pillar, or headstone. This differs from the coinciding Soviet-state tendency in Great Patriotic War (World War II) memorials which usually portray heroic male figures, often soldiers. One example is the *Salaspils Memorial* in Latvia, an ensemble of monumental figures installed several meters apart (Fig. 1). At the center of the complex are three towering Soviet soldiers, one saluting, surrounded by a struggling man and woman. Next to the soldiers is a woman shielding children with her arms, presumably their mother. This female figure, with stern expression, stares straight ahead, evoking rather overtly a sense of purpose and power. Other times, the artists opt for abstraction. An example is *Monument to the Victims of Fascism* in Kaunas, Lithuania, consisting of three massive structures, like boulders, carved jaggedly with sharp edges (Fig. 2). Amongst these planes one deciphers the fists and faces of men. They are likely soldiers because the memorial is at the Ninth Fort, a historic military base used by both the Russian and Soviet army, and ultimately the Nazis as a mass grave site.<sup>32</sup> This repetitive fist form is identifiable as the raised fist (pioneered by the Industrial Workers of the World), a common image in state propaganda and salute throughout the Soviet period.<sup>33</sup> A symbol of resistance, strength, and unity the broader Soviet public is familiar with.

Yet, the figurative memorials throughout this chapter make different demands of their publics. World War II memorials are often categorized rather simply between figurative and

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<sup>32</sup> James Mark, "Containing Fascism: Anti-Communism in the Age of Holocaust Memory," in *The Unfinished Revolution, Making Sense of the Communist Past in Central-Eastern Europe* (Yale University Press, 2010), 93–125, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5vksnn.9>.

<sup>33</sup> Joyce Kornbluh, ed., *Rebel Voices: An IWW Anthology* (Chicago, Illinois: Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company, 1998).

abstract. In the field of art history, Rosalind Krauss notoriously states “the modernist period produces monuments unable to refer to anything beyond themselves as pure marker or base.”<sup>34</sup> Krauss suggests that the monument (established here as a kind of memorial sculpture) is meant to reference something and without explicitly saying so, a specific memory or past. Thus, Krauss argues that because monuments function within a “logic of representation and marking,” they are usually figurative.<sup>35</sup> As a critic of high modernism, Krauss maps out a trajectory of sculpture beginning in the late nineteenth century based on a particular, ultimately limited portion of works made during the modernist period. Much of what exists outside this high modernist tradition complicates Krauss’s timeline. One area most definitely is the wide spanning memorials of World War II.

While art historians such as Krauss think about figuration during the modernist period in this way, from the perspective of Jewish studies figuration and abstraction hold different meaning. James Young, scholar of Holocaust memorials, asks if the “abstract, self-referential monument” ever truly commemorates “events outside of itself?”<sup>36</sup> Young’s question implies there is a closer relationship of figuration and abstraction and one different from the opposing poles established by Krauss in her history of high modernist sculpture in which she insists that the stylistic differences between figuration and abstraction influence a monument’s success in achieving this “logic” far less than its particular symbolic presence. Yet, Young simultaneously declares that “the lay public” prefers figurative memorials, such as the *Warsaw Ghetto Monument*, over abstract works like Sol LeWitt’s *Black Form*.<sup>37</sup> Thus Young assumes the

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<sup>34</sup> Rosalind Krauss, “Sculpture in the Expanded Field,” *October* 8 (1979): 30, <https://doi.org/10.2307/778224>.

<sup>35</sup> Krauss.

<sup>36</sup> James E. Young, “The Counter-Monument: Memory against Itself in Germany Today,” *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 2 (1992): 267–96.

<sup>37</sup> Shelley Hornstein and Florence Jacobowitz, *Image and Remembrance: Representation and the Holocaust* (Indiana University Press, 2003).



existence of a universal public. Looking at these two examples, both are Holocaust memorials in city centers, one outside the POLIN Museum and the other in front of Hamburg's neoclassical town hall. In other words, these are largely passed by, often en route to elsewhere, rather than necessarily attended. With regard to folk memorials, on the other hand, we must distinguish their publics from this universal "lay public" referenced by Young. Perhaps defined as those surrounded by other things, at densely populated sites, nearby popular establishments? Depending on the public, forms have different meanings. These differences between figuration and abstraction are not as significant as that between symbols, whether figurative or abstract. When looking at these figurative memorials, figures are assessed for their processes of symbolization, as with more abstract symbols like the fence seen prior, in order to understand what these symbols provide their public and ultimately locating the specific use of figuration in folk memorials. What we then see is another framework for distinguishing between memorials, not just figurative and abstract: one more in touch with a memorial's intended public, rather a universal "lay public."

### **Mother Figures and the Figurative Memorial**

This image of the lone, sullen female in figurative memorials is reshaped by a memorial's context, particularly its intended public. In Rudnya, USSR, a crowd surrounds a rectangular pillar (Fig. 3). The pillar, made of two uniformly stacked blocks, resembles a monolith. A relief of a woman's face protrudes from one edge, her hair fading into the stone (Fig. 4). She frowns with eyes closed and brows furrowed. A poem in Russian carved below identifies the figure and informs on her facial expression: "I am a mother, I am the motherland, I am sleepless like the conscience. I remember every wail of the tormented people...." This mother, a universal mother,

grieves while pronouncing to remember. One might associate this image with the Pietà, a canonical representation of the weeping Mary, mother of Jesus, cradling her son's dead body. While often linked to the Northern and Italian Renaissance, the Piet is also a common theme in Russian icons. The memorial claims to represent the *rodina-mat*, mother motherland, though traditional representations of the personified "motherland" are full figures. They are monumental and armed, evoking power rather than suffering (Fig. 5). Perhaps she represents a mother of soldiers, although that makes less sense because soldiers are not buried here.

Both images were taken at the unveiling ceremony of Lev Kerbel's *Mother in Mourning*, commemorating the mass murder of Rudnya's Jews.<sup>38</sup> Women and mothers, particularly biblical Rachel, are common mourning figures throughout Jewish tradition. In the Torah, specifically the Book of Jeremiah, "songs of communal loss" have been called "a maternal legacy" because the skill of mourning is meant to be passed down. Jeremiah is often cited for this: "Hear, O women, the word of the Lord...teach your daughters wailing, And one another lamentation" (Jeremiah 9).

<sup>39</sup> An alternative translation of these "women" in Jeremiah 9 is "wise women" or "skilled women," prompting some to argue that such a term constitutes "a professional trade that required training."<sup>40</sup> Regardless of professionalism, it is evident that the practice of mourning in the Torah was a skill of sorts because it was not intuitive but specifically had to be taught. Later in Jeremiah comes "Mother Rachel," heard "wailing," "weeping" "for her children, who are gone."<sup>41</sup> Like the Virgin Mary in Christianity, Rachel is referred to as the archetypal mourning

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<sup>38</sup> "Information Portal to European Sites of Remembrance," accessed March 8, 2020, <https://www.memorialmuseums.org/eng/denkmaeler/view/837/%C2%BBMourning-Mother%C2%AB-Monument>.

<sup>39</sup> Yopie Prins and Maeera Shreiber, *Dwelling in Possibility: Women Poets and Critics on Poetry* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018).

<sup>40</sup> Juliana Claassens, *Mourner, Mother, Midwife: Reimagining God's Delivering Presence in the Old Testament* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012).

<sup>41</sup> Cia Sautter, "The Rachel Tradition: Dancing Death," in *The Miriam Tradition: Teaching Embodied Torah* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 107–31, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/j.ctt2ttbn9.9>.

mother because she comes to take on the role of the lamenting woman mentioned earlier in Jeremiah. Rachel mourns for her children, who represent a broader civilization. The Lament of Rachel is also a common subject of Orthodox icons (Fig. 6). Iconic renditions closely resemble the fourteenth-century fresco of Rachel at Markos Monastery (Fig. 7). All depict one female figure encircled by a mass of children facing toward her. Rachel towers above her children, accentuated by raised hands nearly spanning the width of her children on both sides. This dynamic resembles the image of Rudnya's *Mother in Mourning* ceremony, in which a mass of visitors surrounds the central sculpture of a mother (Fig.3). Like Rachel in the fresco, this mother figure looks over those around her. The Rudnya community responsible for *Mother in Mourning* makes up the crowd in this image. This includes the family of the deceased and survivors. A mother figure evokes such intimate ties. While most associate biblical images of a lamenting mother with Mary, the Rachel figure provides an alternative figure of mourning and an earlier one.

### **Rachel's Lament or the Mourning Mother**

Mother figures in a Soviet war context simultaneously reference the *rodina-mat*, mother motherland. And *rodina-mat* is precisely the term used in the poem, *Mother in Mourning*. The Russian mother archetype descends from religious thought, a variation of *bogomater*, Mother of God, and the Slavic cult of *mat' syraia zemlia*, mother moist earth.<sup>42</sup> The anti-religion Soviet state incorporates the mother archetype in art by distancing it from all Christian connotations. For example, the iconic Soviet film *Circus* debuts "Song of the Motherland," often called "an

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<sup>42</sup> Hans Günther and Sonja Kerby, "'Broad Is My Motherland': The Mother Archetype and Space in the Soviet Mass Song," in *The Landscape of Stalinism*, ed. Evgeny Dobrenko and Eric Naiman, The Art and Ideology of Soviet Space (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2003), 77–95, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvcwn4bc.10>.

unofficial national anthem.”<sup>43</sup> The song opens, “Broad is my motherland, many are her forests, fields, and rivers! I know no other such land, where so freely does a man breathe.” Referencing a mother of earth, the Soviet state does not advocate the original or literal cult of *mat’ syraia zemlia*, but rather pictures the people of the lands of Russia under one mother as a way of relating this unification to a familial bond. Such a comparison is an attempt to encourage a sense of Soviet nationalism in a still quite young state, under different pretenses than Marxist ideology.

<sup>44</sup> *Rodina-mat*, a monumental, strong and armed image of mother motherland, became a primary symbol of Soviet resistance in post-World War II state monuments, from the 1967 *Motherland Calls* seen above to the 1981 *Motherland Monument* in Kyiv.<sup>45</sup> The Soviet iteration of motherland, expressed in “Song of the Motherland,” especially, resonates in the context of war, which is usually premised on the annexation of land and reliant on nationalism. It was not until organizers appealed to the Supreme Soviet (RSFSR) that local authorities accepted the *Mother in Mourning* memorial in Rudnya. Approval resided on the condition that the monument be in the Jewish cemetery and “ethnically neutral.”<sup>46</sup> The latter explains why the *rodina mat* was typically depicted as crying, fragmented, and unarmed---far more in line with the aesthetics of the Lamentation of Rachel. In *Mother in Mourning*, the *rodina-mat* figure merges with Rachel, forming a public different from traditional renditions of mother motherland.

Some figurative memorials recall Rachel’s lament more overtly. A memorial complex in the forest of Simnas, Lithuania similarly portrays a woman’s face in stone (Fig. 8). Like the fenced memorial in Skuodos, steps ascend to the primary sculpture. This memorial, made of a

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<sup>43</sup> Emma Widdis, “Conquest,” in *Visions of a New Land*, Soviet Film from the Revolution to the Second World War (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 142–89, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1nphd8.11>.

<sup>44</sup> Günther and Kerby, ““Broad Is My Motherland.””

<sup>45</sup> Louise Hardiman and Nicola Kozicharov, *Modernism and the Spiritual in Russian Art: New Perspectives* (Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2017).

<sup>46</sup> Zeltser, *Holocaust Monuments in the Soviet Union*.

stone still in its natural, jagged state, is secluded and scarcely known. After the war, the site was immediately marked, but it was not until 1991 that the memorial was built.<sup>47</sup> To the sculpture's right and left are plaques in Russian, Lithuanian, and Hebrew: one-thousand Simnas Jews were murdered here. Unlike *Mother in Mourning*, this memorial did not have to be "ethnically neutral." Visiting today, one finds no signs that detail the memorial's location in the forest, except for a stone marker indicating "Holocaust Mass Graves" forty meters onward. Unlike *Mother in Mourning*, this woman's eyes are wide open. Her hair is concealed by sculpted cloth, resembling a headscarf or *tallit*, the Jewish ritual shawl placed over the head during prayer. Like the subject of this memorial, the Rachel in Lamentation of Rachel icons always wears a headscarf (Fig. 6). In 1970, a memorial depicting a similar weeping woman with headscarf was built in Krupki, Belarus (Fig. 9) Aniconism is common in Jewish tradition, making figuration rare, but in a memorial for Jews one might associate this cloth with a tallit. Although Eastern Orthodox headscarves and tallit are not the same, both suggest observance; not necessarily of religious dogma but, given the memorial context, mourning.

Other formal features suggest that the Simnas memorial depicts a figure of lamentation. First, that the memorial is made out of a single stone, still largely in its natural state. Placing a stone on a grave is a Jewish mourning ritual. In the former Soviet Union, at memorial sites and Jewish headstones today, stones are laid by visitors (Fig. 10). The process of finding a stone and placing it at a gravesite is a sign of acknowledgment and lasting form of commemoration. While the ritual's origins are contested, most agree on the fact that it is an act of marking. Some rabbis interpret the custom as a *mitzvah*, moral deed of religious duty, descending from ancient times. Before graves were commonly marked, the accumulation of rocks created a marker stable across

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<sup>47</sup> "Simnas, Lithuania, A Monument to 1000 Jews Murdered at the Site in August 1941, Postwar," Yad Vashem, accessed March 9, 2020, [https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item\\_id=40011&ind=103](https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item_id=40011&ind=103).

time while preventing the body from being stepped on and impurified.<sup>48</sup> A stone or pile of stones is a proto-headstone. Others rabbis root it in the stone as metaphor throughout Jewish religious text. Regardless of origin, choosing to make the memorial out of a single rock, and identifiable as such, is likely a reference to this mourning custom. A memorial that embodies a ritual practiced widely prior to the war constructs its meanings around that pre-war community. Another act of mourning is *shemira*, the Jewish ritual of watching over the body from time of death to burial.<sup>49</sup> This is often performed by family members, but also volunteers serving out of religious duty. The Simnas memorial's subject evokes this activity of watching, and her eyes resemble that of Sumerian votive figures: wide open, inlaid and enlarged (Fig. 11). Votive figures represent worshippers not physically present, their stylized eyes exaggerating observance and presence. This memorial acts as the ceremonial watcher via symbolization. Literally looking over the deceased, the memorial's figure performs *shemira* for those denied proper burial rites. Rooting a memorial's aesthetics in domestic mourning practice provides a "counter public" with a symbol. This public is "counter" because it exists as an alternative, separate discursive arena to the dominant one. The aesthetics of the Simnas memorial appeal to a set of beliefs and ideas, in this case domestic mourning customs, practiced by a particular community within the broader public.

### **Publics of the Mourning Mother**

Locating contradictions between these mother figures and others of the same period shows how different symbols create distinct publics. For example, it is significant that both the

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<sup>48</sup> "Placing a Stone," Shiva: The Resource for Jewish Mourning, accessed March 9, 2020, <https://www.shiva.com/learning-center/commemorate/stone>.

<sup>49</sup> Arnold M. Goodman, *A Plain Pine Box: A Return to Simple Jewish Funerals and Eternal Traditions* (Brooklyn, NY: KTAV Publishing House, 2003).

*Mother in Mourning* and Simnas memorial communicate mother figures without actually depicting children. Comparing these memorials to those which do reveal how these contradictory mother figures appeal to vastly different publics. It is significant to note that those which signal motherhood through children tend to portray one male child. For example, in Mirgorod, Ukraine a monumental sculpture depicts a woman embraced by a small boy (Fig. 12). The female figure, towering over the surrounding trees, looks down towards the child with a solemn expression. The child's face, on the other hand, is concealed by her body; the memorial's central force. This omission provokes spectators to locate and thus focus on the boy's situation. Based on their embrace, this child seems to press his head into her stomach as she awkwardly crouches to accommodate holding him. Images of a woman comforting a child evoke the dynamic of mother and son without explicitly referencing motherhood. But why commemorate genocide victims with just a son? In the context of the Great Patriotic War, in which teenage boys served, the relationship between mother and son recalls the Soviet soldier. If so, this memorial appeals to its audience through a vector different from the other mother seen prior in this chapter. Ultimately, an iteration of motherhood emphasizing the soldier creates a broader public because it recalls a dominant experience rather than that of a marginalized community or group. It also recalls the soldiers of the most well-known Great Patriotic War monuments.

This image of mother and son is another iteration of the figurative memorial of the mourning mother. However, like the mourning mother, it is also informed by the *rodina-mat*, mother-motherland, as this is arguably the most pervasive mother figure, at least in public sculpture, of this contemporary moment. And perhaps she is even more related to these memorials of mother and son because they similarly appeal to a collective Soviet experience, in this case as soldier or mother of soldier in the Great Patriotic War. Hence the pervasive use of

*Rodina-mat* in Great Patriotic War monuments commemorating Soviet soldiers and why classic mother-motherland monuments are armed. In Dzerzhinsk, Ukraine a memorial depicts a mother and son (Fig. 13). A female figure, holding up a boy, extends from a boulder. Both have an intense facial expression. As in Mirgorod, they can be identified as mother and son by the dynamics of their interaction. Both look in the same direction their bodies face, signaling a source of their focus and intensity. This memorial, erected in 1982, bears an inscription dedicated “to the residents of Dzerzhinsk...murdered at the hands of the German-fascist occupiers during the Great Patriotic War 1941-1945.”<sup>50</sup>

The monument’s figures recall the experience and memory of Soviet soldiers due to the emphasis on the boy figure. Such symbolic distinctions create a public different from other mother figures seen previously in this chapter. The nature of the Dzerzhinsk memorial ceremony is captured in a photograph of the memorial sculpture: two Soviet children wearing matching uniforms salute before it (Fig. 13). This is an attribute which makes sense in the context of a memorial commemorating Soviet soldiers, often pictured with these patriotic processions organized with the state. This is not to suggest that this defines its public, but rather to display how a memorial’s aesthetics change and/or broaden its possible audience. And not just between aesthetics which are simply figurative versus abstract. Sources suggest that state commemoration at the mother and son memorial exists alongside the surviving Jews of Dzerzhinsk (formerly Romanov), who since the war have returned to the site every August 25<sup>th</sup>.<sup>51</sup> Their ritualized memorialization, rooted in personal mourning, preceded the official memorial sculpture built forty years later and the broader public it creates. This memorial sculpture, inspiring commemoration, highlights the sacrifices of a universal Soviet soldier.

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<sup>50</sup> “Dzerzhinsk,” *The Untold Stories: The Murder Sites of the Jews in the Occupied Territories of the Former USSR*, accessed April 4, 2020, <https://www.yadvashem.org/untoldstories/database/commemoration.asp?cid=183>.

<sup>51</sup> “The Untold Stories.”



## Conclusions

Looking at the figurative memorial and mother figures more closely portrays the significance of a memorial's individual process of symbolization. This approach is an alternative framework providing more nuanced analyses of sculpture which take into account a structure's public. As shown, these different mother figures alone create different publics. Some figurative memorials attract counter publics while others appeal to a far wider audience by using symbols representing more broadly relevant experiences or events. Yet, such different results are all achieved through a mother image. These divergences show that particular symbols influence publics far more than style, such as between figurative and abstract. Such an approach also shows why memorials should not be discussed in regard to a universal "lay public" and their ability or inability to comprehend abstract forms, but instead memorials' intended publics' relationship to specific symbols.

Chapter 2: Figures



Fig. 1. *Salaspils Memorial Ensemble*, 1967, concrete, Salaspils, Latvia,  
[https://www.project28.co.uk/gallery/riga\\_latvia/d81d5f6c-874f-11e8-b003-6e313f7bf4a1?image\\_keywords=Salaspils+Memorial](https://www.project28.co.uk/gallery/riga_latvia/d81d5f6c-874f-11e8-b003-6e313f7bf4a1?image_keywords=Salaspils+Memorial).



Fig. 2. Alfonsas Vincentas Ambraziūnas, *Monument to the Victim of Fascism*, 1966-1984, reinforced concrete, IX Fort, Kaunas, Lithuania,  
<http://www.alfonsasambraziunas.lt/sort/paminklai/>.



Fig. 3. Ceremony at the memorial site in memory of the murdered Jews of Rudnya, USSR, October 1965, (Yad Vashem Archive), [https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item\\_id=6513687&ind=0](https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item_id=6513687&ind=0).



Fig. 4. The monument in memory of the 1,200 Jews of Rudnya, USSR, October 1965, (Yad Vashem Archive), [https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item\\_id=6513601&ind=13](https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item_id=6513601&ind=13).





Fig. 5. Volgograd and the Motherland Statue, November 2, 2013, (Volgograd Administration), [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Volgograd\\_and\\_the\\_Motherland\\_statue.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Volgograd_and_the_Motherland_statue.JPG).



Fig. 6. Unknown iconographer, *The Lament of Rachel*, icon, (Flickr), <https://www.flickr.com/photos/firted/5875730244/in/photostream/>.



Fig. 7. "Rachel's Cry," Fresco at St. Marco's Monastery, 14<sup>th</sup>, (Wikimedia Commons), [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fresco\\_-\\_Rachel\\_is\\_weeping\\_for\\_her\\_children.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fresco_-_Rachel_is_weeping_for_her_children.jpg).





Fig. 8. Simnas: The Memorial, (American University School of International Relations. Photography by Arturo C. Porzecanski),  
<http://fs2.american.edu/aporzeca/www/simnas/memorial/memorial.htm>.



Fig. 9. Invitation card to the fortieth anniversary of commemoration ceremony, Krupki, Belarus, 1981, (Yad Vashem),  
<https://www.yadvashem.org/untoldstories/database/commemoration.asp?cid=398>



Fig. 10. Stones laid at the Ponary Memorial, Vilnius, Lithuania, 2019 (Photographs by Gabriella Goldberg).



Fig. 11. Sumerian, Standing male worshiper, c. 2900-2600 B.C., Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/323735>.



Fig. 12. A monument to Jews from the city who perished, Mirgorod, Ukraine, (Yad Vashem), [https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item\\_id=11239&ind=125](https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item_id=11239&ind=125).



Fig. 13. Monument to the residents of Dzerzhinsk, Dzerzhinsk, Ukraine, (Yad Vashem), [https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item\\_id=103430&ind=95](https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item_id=103430&ind=95).



### III. *Materiality: Wood*

At a memorial in Trakai, Lithuania wood serves a ceremonial function. In one photograph, a group faces four logs rising from the ground in resemblance to the trees they once were (Fig. 1). Yet, as logs they are still flattened at the top, stunted from growth. The logs bear no inscription. There is no sign of what they are about. They are not planted in the ground in a straight line, but rather at a slight curve. A group of people, organized in a rough semi-circle, face the logs from several feet away. Are they completing the circle with the logs? All of them look up towards the camera, which is positioned considerably above the scene. Writing on the back of the photograph indicates that it depicts a memorial service at the mass grave of 1,800.<sup>52</sup> Although subtle, these logs are a memorial around which this service is centered. Perhaps the number four holds some significance?

While this is left uncertain, the severed tree remains a symbolic object of ceremony. Those participating in this memorial ceremony position themselves in a semi-circle which mimics the curved row of four logs. Using this photograph as evidence of spatial practice, we see that visitors are physically responding to the memorial by mimicking its shape. Cutting off a tree's growth could represent a multitude of things. In the context of genocide, one might immediately render the act violent, associating it with slaughter. Like tree topping or tipping, the removal of a tree's large branches, a severed tree evokes death. Many trees cannot recover from losing their branches. There is also pollarding, the pruning of a tree's branches for further growth.

Trees hold a special significance within the Jewish tradition, especially their planting. In the Talmud, the planting of a carob tree, while bearing no fruit for seventy years, provides for

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<sup>52</sup> "Trakai (Troki), Lithuania, A Memorial Service for 1800 Dead at a Mass Grave.," Yad Vashem, accessed March 24, 2020, [https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item\\_id=27139&ind=0](https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item_id=27139&ind=0).



future generations; the man who plants this tree does so “for my descendants,” “just as my ancestors planted for me.”<sup>53</sup> Perhaps these logs represent, not stunted trees but rather those in the process of growing. But this memorial seems far from signifying growth.

In the realm of public art, wood is a very uncommon material. Conceptually, public art encompasses all art installed in public places, especially outdoors. Yet, installing art in public places usually requires a “formal public process” of approval.<sup>54</sup> Such a process implies government sanction and often funding, which typically demands that the object be lasting. For example, why pay for something, in material and labor, knowing it will rot? Public art, a big investment, often tries to fossilize and commemorate certain events or sponsorships. Thus, wood is generally not a good material for public art because it deteriorates more quickly than others when exposed to the elements. Hence, stone, metal, or concrete is used over ephemeral materials. On the other hand, this is why wood is so unusual and perhaps even antithetical to public art. All of these distinctions attest to a difference between public art and art in public places.

What is the significance of a memorial that changes with time, ultimately disintegrating? Why build memorials out of wood, a living material which rots outdoors, when memorials require money and resources to create? In some cases, wood was all these makers could afford or find. Yet, many folk memorials harness wood’s materiality into an aesthetic. These memorials use wood’s transience to replicate cultural funerary rites expressing the transience of the body and a return to the earth after death. Wood is also used for its significance in Jewish and/or other tradition, which is prioritized over the memorial’s longevity. These memorials’ aesthetics, responding to different needs, cannot be explained by public art’s logic.

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<sup>53</sup> “Taanit 23a: The William Davidson Talmud,” Sefaria, accessed March 24, 2020, [//www.sefaria.org/Taanit.23a](http://www.sefaria.org/Taanit.23a).

<sup>54</sup> “What Is Not Public Art?,” Public Art In Public Places, accessed April 17, 2020, <https://sites.google.com/publicartinpublicplaces.info/public-art-in-public-places/home/what-is-not-public-art>.

## Ceremonial Woods

An iteration of temporal memorials invites active participation. In Kovel, Ukraine a man embraces a wooden column inscribed: “Here lay 18,000 victims” (Fig. 2). At the war’s end survivors built a memorial on this mass grave site, a sand lot in Kovel’s outskirts. The memorial was mainly a column enclosed by a wooden fence.<sup>55</sup> This column’s meaning is greatly rooted in its site, a mass grave. The column, physically planted in the burial ground, commemorates the deceased by summoning participation in honoring them through marking. It is not only the column which marks the site, but also those who activate the column by interacting with it in prayer. Though perhaps more aesthetically reminiscent of domestic architecture than the natural world, this column has not been treated to withstand weathering, much like wooden tombstones which the column resembles in material and form. More than just a sign for the passing of information, this memorial is a source of ceremony. Ceremony is triggered by the meeting of column and mourners, such as the man wrapping his arms around the column as he prays. Memorialization occurs when the wood column (on a burial site) is confronted by visitors, who are subsequently guided into mourning rituals. Meanwhile the forest has grown over this site since it was made in 1944. Memorials have been rebuilt in the original’s image as visitors continue to return.

There is a rich woodworking practice in Lithuania, beginning in the seventeenth-century.<sup>56</sup> The placement of a decorative wooden pole outside homes for protection from plagues, famine, and war was one part of this tradition.<sup>57</sup> Scholars claim that after Lithuania gained independence from Russia in 1918, wooden monuments so densely populated the

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<sup>55</sup> “Bakhiv (Kovel),” accessed March 24, 2020, <http://www.protecting-memory.org/en/memorial-sites/bakhiv-2/>.

<sup>56</sup> Ruta Saliklis, “Sacred Woods,” in *Sacred Wood: The Contemporary Lithuanian Woodcarving Revival* (Madison, Wisconsin: Chazen Museum of Art, 1998), 1–2, <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/Arts.SacredWood>.

<sup>57</sup> Saliklis.

Lithuanian landscape that at certain locations, they could be found every hundred feet.<sup>58</sup> Many images show poles installed in front of structures, usually dwellings, also made of wood. These wooden monuments were originally treated as shrines, visited by individuals for intercessions to particular saints or other religious figures.<sup>59</sup> While these shrines varied, they were always in the form of a wooden pole with figurative carvings, usually of saints, and an architectural element. This element ranged from a simple roof to a complex chapel or bell tower. While religious woodcarving is in no way specific to Lithuania, these carved symbols took on secular meanings in Lithuania during the Russian occupation that made these wooden monuments so widespread after independence. For example, when Russia banned Lithuanian publications from 1865 to 1904, monuments depicting Saint Anne or Saint Peter holding a book safely objected to Russian hegemony.<sup>60</sup> At the same time, these shrines retained their original protective purpose, in this case protecting those smuggling Lithuanian publications through the woods.<sup>61</sup> Through this process, wooden poles go from functioning as highly personal, individual shrines to symbols of national protest. These wooden shrines so densely populated the Lithuanian landscape after independence because they were no longer just installed outside personal property but in places like the forest. Perhaps this is due to the fact that wooden poles were no longer advocating for an individual but rather for a collective, thus needing to occupy public places.

Although commonly associated with pagan and Christian practice and iconography, woodworking was also practice by non-Christians.<sup>62</sup> Wood was commonly used in Jewish religious and funerary objects prior to World War II, partly due to the material's accessibility in

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<sup>58</sup> Saliklis.

<sup>59</sup> Milda Bakšys Richardson, "Reverence and Resistance in Lithuanian Wayside Shrines," *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 10 (2005): 249–67.

<sup>60</sup> Richardson.

<sup>61</sup> Richardson.

<sup>62</sup> I have used "non-Christian" rather than non-Christian Lithuanians, to emphasize this practice exceeded Lithuania's contemporary borders.

landscapes consisting largely of forest and water. Perhaps best known are the wooden synagogues of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.<sup>63</sup> While mostly burned during the war, some of these synagogues still exist in poor condition and others have been restored.<sup>64</sup>

Wooden tombstones were also used here since the sixteenth century. They called these wooden tablets for the dead *matsevah*, from the biblical story about sacred pillars. *Matsevah* means literally headstone, but most often in this region they consisted of a plank of wood with a curved top.<sup>65</sup> Usually these planks were left blank, but sometimes additional painted or carved text details information about the deceased on one side of the wood. No existing headstones suggest use of figuration or any ornamentation at all. Most wooden *matsevahs* were undecorated planks of wood. Although some could afford stone, the majority of Jewish communities throughout this area used wood since early on. Aware of wood's short life, such headstones were tall and lowered into the ground over time; sometimes replaced with stone years later, but usually not.<sup>66</sup> In other words, these headstones were intended to be transitory. The ritualized revisiting and maintaining of these headstones, knowing their impermanence, indicate their ceremonial function. In addition to providing the deceased with a proper burial, the revisiting and maintaining of headstones gives mourners opportunities for lamentation. In this sense, wooden headstones are also a marker of grief. Jewish funerary rites, premised in recurring acts of gathering for the purpose of honoring the dead, are encouraged by these headstones because their ephemerality requires visitation and care.

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<sup>63</sup> Predominately modern-day Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Belarus, Ukraine, and parts of Russia

<sup>64</sup> "Wooden Synagogues in Lithuania," Center for Jewish Art, August 5, 2007, <https://web.archive.org/web/20070805112653/http://cja.huji.ac.il/Architecture/Wooden-synagogues-Lithuania.htm>.

<sup>65</sup> Tomasz Wiśniewski, "Wooden Tombstones" (European Jewish Cemeteries: An Interdisciplinary Conference, Vilnius, Lithuania: Rothschild Foundation, 2015), 36.

<sup>66</sup> Wiśniewski.

After the desecration of these communities and their tombstones in the Second World War, wood continued to be a primary material for funerary objects. The perseverance of wood suggests that these wooden memorials descend from the pre-war wooden tombstone tradition. Responding to genocide, funerary objects increasingly meant memorials atop mass graves rather than individual headstones. Some of these memorials made of wood closely resemble the shape and recall wooden tombstones. One scholar interprets the wooden tombstone's rounded top as the deceased's head.<sup>67</sup> Following this logic, the wooden tombstone recalls that of the human body through life and, in Jewish tradition, death.<sup>68</sup> One aspect of bereavement in Judaism is *shemira*, the ritual of observing the body from time of death to burial.<sup>69</sup> Another part of *shemira* is ensuring the body returns to the ground.<sup>70</sup> That funerary rite is similarly reflected in the contemporary practice of shoveling dirt over the grave, occurring at many Jewish funerals. This ritual, like an object that deteriorates over time, simulates a return to earth. Temporal memorials, which similarly deteriorate and rot into earth, likely reference wooden headstones because they address passage and death in kindred communities. Temporal memorials such as the Kovel column reference wooden tombstones in form and thus their signification of passing, but also differ aesthetically. Some temporal memorials use figuration, featuring humans, architecture, and/or ornamentation. When they are minimal, most closely resembling wooden tombstones, temporal memorials imitate the shape of a tree through logs or tree trunk in the ground and cut off from growth, while tombstones are flat planks of wood. Lacking the dimensionality of these memorials, wooden tombstones do not as closely reference trees, if at all. Temporal memorials are like wooden tombstones in that they connect their material to a simulation of passage.

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<sup>67</sup> Wiśniewski.

<sup>68</sup> Wiśniewski.

<sup>69</sup> Goodman, *A Plain Pine Box*.

<sup>70</sup> Goodman.

## Totems

Other memorials mend the tree form with figuration, suggesting severance by going through the process of being carved. In the Koshan forest of Lithuania, the Jews of Plunge are buried in six mass graves. Wood pillars carved from trees in the woods make up a memorial complex by Jacob Josef Bunkas. Each sculpture retains the tree trunk form, with figures, symbols and text carved into it. Yet, the figures are always incomplete, constantly bringing forth memory of the material. The tree, always there, exists alongside the figures. Though separate entities, in these sculptures they share a lifetime, both ultimately residing in the ground. How does allowing figures to decay alongside trees relate the human body to nature?

More than one pillar depicts a female figure embracing one or multiple children, suggesting a mother. For example, a woman stands behind a child, holding his or her hand (Fig. 3). A flower is carved above her head, surrounded by a circle. Another portrays a woman holding a man and surrounded by children embracing one another. They each look out in different directions. Above and below the group is dense foliage, growing over their heads and covering their feet (Fig. 4). In others, figures scream, struggle or weep (Fig. 5.1) (Fig.5.2). Their expressions of mourning and grief are refracted in their formal incompleteness, always extending from a tree still planted in the ground. Surrounding these sculptures are mass grave pits. In a memorial to the Plunge massacre, some figures depict those buried amongst them.

This practice of installing figurative wooden pillars in public space both precedes and exceeds this memorial tradition. During World War II, the forest became the site of partisan resistance movements. The trees of these forests hid partisans from Nazi forces while comforting them by providing a space for organization and life in occupied territory. Notions of protection,

evoked by Bunka's comforting imagery, are part of the wayside shrine tradition. The wayside shrine tradition evolves from grave markers in the fifteenth century, from solely marking burial sites to a range of events.<sup>71</sup> These shrines vary in form, but usually combine pagan and Christian figures in addition to common motifs. For example, Saint Florian guarding the home from fire or farm from bad weather. While wayside shrines along with all vernacular folk art were discouraged during the Soviet period, the 1970s witnessed a wayside shrine revival "characterized by a radical shift in form."<sup>72</sup> Wayside shrines became oak trees carved into sculptural poles, resembling totems: "emblems of both a religious and social bond of unity" which "protect the community from evil."<sup>73</sup> In this new iteration, wayside shrines depict secular figures and memorialize contemporary community or national events. They still emphasize protection, but of a larger group and are for community rather than private worship. Is a totem not a memorial?

The forest, composed of trees (made of wood) played a protective role during and post-World War II. Considering all of the folk memorials up to this point, these mass graves were usually in the forest. Yet, because the forest was also used by partisans during the war, the forest became a symbol of resistance in material culture post-occupation. In the final scene of Boris Stepsantsev's animated film *The Pioneer's Violin*, a group of children gather in the forest to mourn a fellow partisan, burning the deceased child's violin in ceremony. Analyzing Stepsantsev's film in the context of its 1971 release, Maya Balakirsky Katz calls the boy's grave "a symbol of mass graves," "like the Paneri forest, where young Jewish activists regularly

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<sup>71</sup> Richardson, "Reverence and Resistance in Lithuanian Wayside Shrines."

<sup>72</sup> Richardson.

<sup>73</sup> Richardson.

gathered in the 1970s.”<sup>74</sup> Here, Katz references memorial ceremonies while maintaining that the forest was also a site of meetings, events, and education.<sup>75</sup> These more contemporary connotations likely contribute to such frequent use of the forest/its materials in memorials through the nineties. Though more importantly, such connotations inform on wood’s significance as a symbol. When used in a memorial context, wood is a material which encompasses the fragmented roles of the forest in these communities over time.

Other memorials in Lithuania, beyond the work of Bunkas, similarly use trees for figurative sculpture, such as a structure in Anyksciai, Lithuania (Fig. 6). This memorial retains its trunk shape, including the visible knots of wood, while bearing symbols: four stars and one larger Star of David carved in low relief. The tree, still rooted in the ground, is topped by a pitched roof interrupting the tree from growth. Like the totem pole, this roof likely descends from the extensive Lithuanian woodcarving tradition. And one type of the Lithuanian wayside shrine is the roofed pole. Artists create an architectural environment through this roof element, which is understood as protecting the totem like the roof does for actual structures.<sup>76</sup> Yet in contrast to traditional roofed pole wayside shrines, this memorial incorporates explicitly Jewish content, rather than pagan-Christian iconography.<sup>77</sup> Regardless of their intricate detail, these sculptures are highly temporary because they are made of wood and reside outdoors. These structures’ initial presence is valued over longevity or reception. As the forest grows over them.

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<sup>74</sup> Maya Balakirsky Katz, “The Pioneer’s Violin: Animating the Soviet Holocaust,” in *Drawing the Iron Curtain, Jews and the Golden Age of Soviet Animation* (Rutgers University Press, 2016), 153–88, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1ch78z4.11>.

<sup>75</sup> Katz.

<sup>76</sup> Richardson, “Reverence and Resistance in Lithuanian Wayside Shrines.”

<sup>77</sup> Richardson.



## Severed Tree as Symbol

Some memorials evoke the severed tree with materials other than wood. These memorials are a transference of the wooden memorial which alters the tree's significance from its materiality to a symbol. Soon after the war's end, a memorial representing a tree with severed branches was built to the Jews of Yemilchino, Ukraine (Fig. 7). This structure, made of stone or concrete, resembles a traditional column monument until its peak, where three short divisions jut out at an angle, representing severed branches. A memorial in Yarmolintsy, Ukraine depicts a very similar tree in stone or concrete, but has additional short "branches" throughout its "trunk" (Fig. 8). The largest branches have "fascism" and "18,000" (representing the number of people buried here) spelled out in white paint. Such words recall the brutality of the site, casting this tone over the symbol of the tree with severed branches. The fact that these memorials are made of stone or concrete suggests that they had a larger budget, likely funded by or in part by the state and thus meant to last. Stone and concrete solidify, forcing the image of the cut tree into permanence.

Here the form of the tree, rather than signifying death and the disintegration of bodies back to earth, or providing a material base for other figurations, does not reference passing. By imprinting this form, these memorials transform the severed tree into a symbol. Perhaps the severed tree, evoking violence, signifies genocide? In a permanent material, the symbol functions as a reminder of this event over time. Wooden memorials, on the other hand, are vessels of mourning. In this sense, the permanent severed tree operates more like a monument than memorial because it commemorates an event rather than individuals.

World War II memorials from beyond the Soviet Union similarly reference vernacular materials such as wood through more permanent materials. For example, Ranko Radovic's

*Memorial House* at the *Memorial Complex to the Battle of Sutjeska* evokes a regional wooden dwelling in unfinished concrete (Fig. 9). Dedicated to a specific battle, this memorial is a physical reminder of an event. While it has a commemorative function, this memorial complex was part of a larger political project, funded by the state, focused on “preserving cultural memory of the anti-fascist struggle.”<sup>78</sup> This memorial commemorates a significant national event and signifies the perseverance of political, specifically anti-fascist, ideology. At the Yarmolintsy memorial, the artist has carved shallow lines into the material in an effort to resemble tree bark. Like this severed tree memorial, Radovic’s memorial adapts a vernacular material and related cultural practice into a symbol by solidifying that material/practice in a more permanent material.

## Conclusions

Thinking about wood’s materiality and memorials reveals how temporality is used in visual significations of death. From minimal logs to intricately carved poles, temporal memorials relate their material to form in order to signify processes of passing. While each memorial uses the pole form differently, they all rely on wood to create an aesthetic of ephemerality. Wood signifies death and the disintegration of bodies back to the earth. Sometimes wood is also used as a base for other figurations that simultaneously disintegrate. Temporal memorials contradict much of public art’s logic. Public monuments are almost never constructed out of wood and yet all temporal memorials are installed in public places. While definitely related to “good investment,” i.e. avoiding the extra cost of dealing with the maintenance of a rotting monument, this is not the only reason wood is so uncommon in “official public art” that is funded by the

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<sup>78</sup> Sanja Horvatinčić, “Memorial Sculpture and Architecture in Socialist Yugoslavia,” in *Toward a Concrete Utopia: Architecture in Yugoslavia 1948-1980* (New York, New York: Museum of Modern Art New York, 2018), 104–11.

state.<sup>79</sup> Public art tends to fossilize significant events, which is difficult to do with wood. In regard to memorials, the use of wood by families/communities and not the state reflects their opposing relationships to the deceased. Families and communities, those with personal ties to the deceased, make memorials for the purpose of mourning those individuals. The state, on the other hand, perceives these individuals in masses. As a result, the state often produces memorials to preserve the memory of national events. In this sense, looking at the function of wood in folk memorials call attention to how the memorial is understood and imagined by other publics.

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<sup>79</sup> Cher Krause Knight, *Public Art: Theory, Practice and Populism* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008).



Fig. 1. A memorial service for 1800 dead at a mass grave, Trakai, Lithuania, 1950s, (Yad Vashem), [https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item\\_id=27139&ind=0](https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item_id=27139&ind=0).



Fig. 2. Man reading the Mourner's Kaddish while clasping the wooden memorial column, Kovel, Ukraine, 1944, (Global Jewish Advocacy), <http://www.protecting-memory.org/en/memorial-sites/bakhiv-2/>.





Fig. 3. A monument to the Jews of the town, Plunge, Lithuania, Postwar, (Yad Vashem), [https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item\\_id=34797&ind=3](https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item_id=34797&ind=3).



Fig. 4. Josef Bunka, Wood sculpture in the Koshan forest where all Jews from Plunge were shot and buried, Plunge, Lithuania, (Yad Vashem), [https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item\\_id=5103&ind=1](https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item_id=5103&ind=1).





Fig. 5.1. Josef Bunka, Wood sculpture in the Koshan forest where all Jews from Plunge were shot and buried, Plunge, Lithuania, (Museum of Family History, 2006), [http://www.fisherfamily.za.net/memorials\\_for\\_lithuanian\\_shtetls.htm](http://www.fisherfamily.za.net/memorials_for_lithuanian_shtetls.htm).



Fig. 5.2. Josef Bunka, Wood sculpture in the Koshan forest where all Jews from Plunge were shot and buried, Plunge, Lithuania, (Museum of Family History, 2006), [http://www.fisherfamily.za.net/memorials\\_for\\_lithuanian\\_shtetls.htm](http://www.fisherfamily.za.net/memorials_for_lithuanian_shtetls.htm).



Fig. 6. A memorial point to the side of a mass murder, Anyksciai, Lithuania, (Yad Vashem), [https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item\\_id=34103&ind=0](https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item_id=34103&ind=0).





Fig. 7. A monument to the Jews of the area who were murdered in 1947, Yemilchino, Ukraine, (Yad Vashem), [https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item\\_id=70977&ind=15](https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item_id=70977&ind=15).



Fig. 8. A monument in memory of those murdered at the site, Yarmolintsy, Ukraine, (Yad Vashem), [https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item\\_id=77179&ind=0](https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item_id=77179&ind=0).



Fig. 9. Ranko Radović, *Memorial House* at the *Memorial Complex to the Battle of Sutjeska*, 1974, Tjentište, Bosnia, and Herzegovina (Formerly Yugoslavia), (Monumentalism, Photograph by Darmon Richter), <http://www.monumentalism.net/tjentiste-memorial-house/>.

#### ***IV. Intimate Publics, Photographic Mementos***

A photograph depicts a group of men standing around a wooden monument in Rowne, USSR (Fig. 1). Some of the them position themselves on either side of the structure while two hold themselves up behind it. Over the snowy ground on which they stand, there is writing on the physical photograph. The text says that here is where occupiers buried alive the 23,500 Jewish people of Rowne. This writing closely resembles the text inscribed on monuments and other kinds of memorials. Yet here it is not the memorial structure that passes on this information, but the photograph. This image's careful composition, with handwritten text, indicates intention. These men who are pictured do not need this additional writing to know where they were gathered or why; the object is not intended for them. This photographic object replicates the gathering, with its ceremonial purpose, into something portable and constant. The act of framing oneself in a photograph at a designated site of trauma marks loss while creating an "immutable mobile" that functions as a memorial of its own.

"Immutable mobiles" are objects that combine inscription with mobilization. These objects respond to what Bruno Latour calls inscription's "problem of visualization and cognition."<sup>80</sup> Sometimes, the medium of visualizations hinders cognition. Latour argues that our perception of an inscription not only depends on aspects of visualization, print, and writing, but medium and form as it relates to other possible channels of circulation. Inscriptions which are immobile and/or ultimately wither away cannot be perceived outside of a location and moment. Latour supplies the example of a map in the sand versus the notebook.<sup>81</sup> The notebook is transportable while the sand is fixed at a site; the notebook is immutable, at least compared to

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<sup>80</sup> Bruno Latour, "Visualisation and Cognition: Drawing Things Together," ed. Henrika Kuklick, *Knowledge and Society Studies in the Sociology of Culture Past and Present* Jai Press vol. 6 (n.d.): 1–40.

<sup>81</sup> Latour.

sand which is equally at risk of wind and tide. Those who wish to communicate visualizations beyond its space and time must adopt a form that is both mobile and enduring. Immutable mobiles adapt inscriptions into portable forms that can be received at many sites and moments.

In *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes situates the modern state of the Monument in opposition to the photograph:

Earlier societies managed so that memory, the substitute for life, was eternal and that at least the thing which spoke Death should itself be immortal: this was the Monument. But by making the (mortal) Photograph into the general and somehow natural witness of ‘what has been,’ modern society has renounced the Monument.<sup>82</sup>

Barthes’s statement is complicated by this Soviet memorial culture, from the existence of temporal memorials and ceremonies to the widespread adoption of portraiture in composing images of these structures. In the photograph from Rowne, the monument is made of wood which, contrary to Barthes’s definition of “the Monument,” is not immortal. And no evidence suggests this monument still exists. Then, according to Barthes, is this structure not a monument? The photograph often outlives the monument it depicts. One may continue to perceive the memorial through the photographic object due to its mobility.

In this chapter photographs will be considered as objects rather than purely as evidence of spatial practices or structures. Group portraits do not function the same as candid shots of ceremonies or unoccupied landscapes, nor do physical photographs function the same as those which only exist digitally. While these distinctions help inform a memorial’s use and intent, here the photograph will be considered as a memorial or what I am calling the “photographic memento.” Photographic mementos are composed, printed (sometimes written on), and

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<sup>82</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard, Reprint edition (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010).

ultimately treated as objects; they adapt a memorial, made of many things, into a mobile and enduring singular object. These photographs, largely consumed within a home and by families, become an intimate memento. The maintenance and preservation of these photographs exhibits their function as memorials independent from the memorial ceremonies or structures they depict.

## **Intimate Publics**

Public formation has been at the center of each chapter of this thesis because folk memorials create a distinct kind of public. Throughout, I have used the term, “counter public,” to stress these were subordinate and alternative discursive arenas. There is still a question of how to characterize the public sphere of these memorials.<sup>83</sup> One might argue that folk memorials are not really “public” at all, either because they are hidden, inaccessible, or documented with few visitors. In this sense, they are rather private because they are attended by a family or small group, with few others even aware of their existence or location. But in post-war communities, physically and existentially damaged, folk memorials facilitate contact and recognition amongst strangers. They are never erected for a single family, but rather are always communal.

These folk memorials create what Lauren Berlant calls an “intimate public.” Unlike artistic movements, defined by relations, or at the least communication, among makers, an intimate public is constituted largely by strangers. It is a public sphere comprised of those “marked by a commonly lived history,” “sharing a worldview and emotional knowledge that they have derived from (this) broadly common historical experience.”<sup>84</sup> In the context of this project, one could argue that the common experience is more concentrated, in the form of an

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<sup>83</sup> Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” *Social Text*, no. 25/26 (1990): 56–80, <https://doi.org/10.2307/466240>.

<sup>84</sup> Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Duke University Press, 2008).



event, in this case ethnic cleansing. On the other hand, many of these memorials include content informed by knowledge which precedes these events alone.

The production of narratives and things is within all intimate publics. In this sense it is a commodity culture, yielding a particular set of ideas and objects, but one which ultimately creates “a space of mediation in which the personal is refracted through the general.”<sup>85</sup> This refractive process, in creating commodities that “recognize” and “reflect” personally-embodied experiences, provides “social belonging.” And these commodities, really narratives and things, are also what reinforce intimacy. Folk memorials are one example of a thing. They do not just physically mark by signifying an event, but facilitate a space for senses of belonging within the more pervasive dominant public. Berlant points out that intimacy is often commodified within culture, for example, into literary or film genres, while threatened or ignored in the political realm.<sup>86</sup> In this sense, folk memorials are not a commodification of intimacy because they not only produce but are a product of intimacy.

### **Photographic Mementos**

One way of addressing these questions surrounding intimacy and memorials is by looking closely at a kind of object’s channels of distribution. For example, the “photographic memento,” group portraits at these memorials are a type of folk memorial independent from the structures they picture. The family photo, a genre of group portraiture in its own right, is largely experienced within the house and by a single family. Such parameters depict the intimate life of these objects. In the case of this project, dealing with images of places or things now distant or gone, the physical photograph becomes an heirloom as significant as any valuable memento. As

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<sup>85</sup> Berlant.

<sup>86</sup> Berlant.

observed by Barthes,<sup>87</sup> the photograph merges with the monument, rather than renouncing it. A family tends to a photographic memento like one does a structure, physically conserving the object while continuing to revisit it. That is why these images continue to exist, though taken years ago, by an individual family member or unit, and are not likely printed in mass. These photographs are often still being cared for and shared by their descendants. It is a cycle that repeats itself. Due to these processes of preservation, the photographic memento is immortal, at least to the extent that any object, such as the monument, can be. Rather, like the traditional monument, the photographic memento achieves its status: distribution alongside care and conservation.

The photographic memento maintains a distinct composition. These photographs must first be distinguished from candid images of memorial ceremonies or people because photographic mementos are premised on intentionality. The taking of these photographs is a collective act for a discrete purpose. This act and the resulting photographic object are not necessarily mutually exclusive from what is being conducted by the memorial itself. The photographic memento specifically depicts a posed group, arranged as so not to conceal the central structure prompting their congregation. In almost every case, subjects look directly at the camera. Sometimes the group is small, such as a family or couple, but more often than not, considerably larger. A particular size seems to be common.

In a photograph of Yarishev, Ukraine, men and women gather beneath a memorial (Fig. 2). They stand close to one another, all looking directly at the camera. The structure, an obelisk form bearing text, resembles traditional monuments. The text on this monument is illegible in the photograph —its subjects prioritized over the structure itself. This decision does not suggest

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<sup>87</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida*.

something about the text's significance so much as it does the use of this image. And perhaps such details matter less amongst intimate publics, where it is possible to obtain information by word of mouth. The personal is often easier to remember. Lore spreads alongside the physical photograph's circulation. Like any memorial structure or ceremony, the photograph is distributed and viewed over many generations. This photograph from Yarishev functions as a memorial for the one who beholds it. This photograph contradicts certain assumptions about photography, such as Barthe's definition of the photograph as "natural witness of what has been."<sup>89</sup> While the Yarishev photograph does serve as evidence of a memorial structure and ceremony, it also provides the present viewer with an independent mourning experience.

Photographic mementos of this period share the aesthetic and use described above. While the Yarishev photograph's date is unknown, its subjects' style of dress resembles that of others. One example is a group photographed in Braslaw, Belarus (Fig. 3). In this image, men, women and children stand in a semi-circle around a memorial structure. Every one of them looks and orients their bodies towards the camera. Men wear the same hat and coat, and women the same headscarf and dress as those in Yarishev. The group is also a similar size, too large for a single family while much smaller than a typical town. This photograph in Braslaw was taken around the same time as the Yarishev photograph, in the 1940s.<sup>90</sup> Another group portrait from the 1940s, at a memorial in Yemilchino, Ukraine echoes this aesthetic and composition as well as style of dress (Fig. 4).<sup>91</sup> The group positions their bodies on both sides of the monument but towards the camera. Everyone, including the only baby in the group, looks directly at the camera. This group composes their bodies in the same manner as the groups in Braslaw and Yarishev: close to one another, uniform in their positions and expressions, but careful not to block the primary

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<sup>89</sup> Barthes.

<sup>90</sup> Zeltser, *Holocaust Monuments in the Soviet Union*.

<sup>91</sup> Zeltser.



structure. All three photographs have survived many decades, attesting to their function as photographic mementos which are intentional and preserved objects.

Sometimes photographic mementos incorporate text in addition to image. Like the photograph from Rowne, this text includes details about the photograph's site similar to the text often inscribed on memorial structures. Many of these images have writing on their front rather than their back. In these cases, the maker/possessor's use of text further emphasizes the photograph as an object. The text is imposed over the image, becoming part of it. It is intentional, never concealing key elements such as the memorial structure or faces of the group. A photograph from Dyatlove, USSR uses the same style of writing: 3,000 Jews were brutally tortured by German occupiers in 1942 (Fig. 5). Like all photographs that include writing from this period, this text is handwritten, emphasizing the photograph's objectness through presence of human touch. This is unlike experiencing graphic text atop images or images on screens in the digital age. When writing is imprinted on the front of a photograph like this, it is physically imposed over the image. Such a decision suggests that the information should be received with the image, placing it at the same level of significance. In the photographic memento, the image is not a separate entity from the photographic object. Perhaps this is even more the case when the photograph has been written on because an additional inscription is made.

## **Conclusions**

We have seen how the photographic memento functions like the memorial in distribution and preservation, but is the photographic memento actually received like a memorial? Contextual factors like the particular relationship between spectator and photographic memento influence reception. These photographs were not reproduced in mass media until the Internet, where they

only exist on personal blogs or digital archives. They are rarely experienced passively. For the most part, the possessor of a photographic memento chooses when to look. Most photographic mementos, passed down like any other significant objects, go through multiple generations of owners. These photographs usually belong to an individual or handful of individuals, all of whom acquired the image similarly; they are distributed along intimate channels. One does not randomly come across them. At the same time, the possessors of these photographs do not constantly revisit but rather decide when to honor them. Just as one decides when to revisit a memorial structure or grave.



Fig. 1. Monument to Holocaust victims murdered in the area 1941-42, Rowne, USSR, (Yad Vashem), [https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item\\_id=55891&ind=0](https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item_id=55891&ind=0).



Fig. 2. A monument on a mass grave, Yarishev, Ukraine, (Yad Vashem),  
[https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item\\_id=19765&ind=0](https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item_id=19765&ind=0).



Fig. 3. A memorial ceremony next to a monument to those who perished in the area, Braslaw, Poland (contemporary Belarus), (Yad Vashem), [https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item\\_id=1666&ind=0](https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item_id=1666&ind=0).



Fig. 4. A monument to the Jews of the area who were murdered in 1947, Yemilchino, Ukraine, (Yad Vashem), [https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item\\_id=70977&ind=15](https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item_id=70977&ind=15).





Fig. 5. A group of Jews at a mass grave where 3,000 Jews are buried, 1958, Dyatlov, USSR, (Yad Vashem), [https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item\\_id=35161&ind=0](https://photos.yadvashem.org/photo-details.html?language=en&item_id=35161&ind=0).

## Conclusions

Just outside Kaunas, Lithuania is the Ninth Fort. Approaching the site today, you first notice gray forms towering above the landscape. These forms, due to their size and color, almost resemble mountains in their environment; there are no buildings in sight, only these constructions peaking above the trees. But the closer you get, the less they resemble the natural world. The trees recede as you confront three massive structures, made of angularly carved concrete. All of the structures are jagged at the top, resembling topography and creating this illusion of mountains from afar. The right and left structures lean towards the central structure, which tilts left before pointing right at its peak; this centrality creates a sense of unity that joins the structures. It is difficult to tell if they are sculptures or architecture. The central structure is thirty-two meters tall. But up close, the faces of men and their fists appear from the sharp edges.

Only after several minutes of approaching these structures does one reach a plaque: it is the *Monument to the Victims of Fascism* (Fig. 1). I saw this monument with my mother after visiting her grandfather's childhood home in nearby Želva. But to be honest, I heard about this work in the "Brutalism Appreciation Society" Facebook group. Here, members often described the monument as "to Nazi genocide" or "a memorial." The Russian Empire built the Ninth Fort at the site in the twentieth-century. It remained under Russian control throughout the first World War, until the Germans turned it into a prison in 1915. During the Soviet occupation of Lithuania, the fort was alternated to a Gulag transfer point. This only lasted until Nazi Germany reoccupied the fort, using it as a death camp. The Jews of Kaunas were murdered here along with Jews from France, Austria, and Germany; it is the largest mass execution of Jews in the Baltics.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Anton Weiss-Wendt and Uğur Ümit Üngör, "Collaboration in Genocide: The Ottoman Empire 1915-1916, the German-Occupied Baltic 1941-1944, and Rwanda 1994," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 25, no. 3 (December 16, 2011): 404–37.



Considering the Ninth Fort's history and what I had heard, these impressions veiled my perception of the monument.

Experiencing *Monument to the Victims of Fascism* today is often misleading, regardless of impressions. Many meters from the structures are several tablets that come across as plaques. The first is a tablet of marble laid flat on the ground (Fig. 2). It is inscribed with an expressionistic illustration of three men in the act of being shot and another illustration of a soldier, identified by his helmet, lying dead on the ground. Below both drawings, "In memory of Soldiers perished on the fields of IX fort 1941-1944," is inscribed in Lithuanian, English, and Russian. Next to this marble, a collection of stone is inscribed with "HERE THE REMAINS OF 50,000 PEOPLE RUSSIANS, JEWS, LITHUANIANS AND OTHERS KILLED BY THE NAZIS—ARE BURIED," also in Lithuanian, English and Russian" (Fig. 3). To the right of this is an entirely different tablet made of black marble. On this tablet, there is a star of David carved alongside: "THIS IS THE PLACE WHERE NAZIS AND THEIR ASSISTANTS KILLED MORE THAN 30,000 JEWS FROM LITHUANIA AND OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES" (Fig. 4). This time, the inscription is written in the three languages of the two tablets above, plus Yiddish and Hebrew. Because these three plaques stand together, it is tempting to consider them as one, and I almost did.

What I could not synthesize was the disparate meanings of these three tablets. Why did a monument require three plaques? And if three plaques, why make each in different material and design? I immediately noticed a resemblance between the figures in the monument and those men drawn on the first plaque, identified as Soviet soldiers. The monument, like the inscription, depicts only men, and some of the men in the monument wear the same helmet as the fallen soldier carved on the plaque. But really what links the figures in the monument to those on the

plaque is their style. Above, I described the plaque's drawing as expressionistic because it is not naturalistic but rather subjective, evoking the figure's inner world, particularly angst. Like the monument, this illustration is also quite angular, first in style but also compositionally because these men's bodies slant at a harsh angle towards the ground. This style expresses a sense of movement and chaos similar to the monument, which also contains angularly-rendered men leaning in different directions. The illustration of these three men falling retains an aesthetic unity, much like the overall tilt of the monument's left and right structures, leaning heavily in opposite directions towards the central structure. After noticing these features, I began associating the monument's figures directly with the men illustrated on the plaque. Both depict men in the process of falling by representing male figures tipping at an angle towards the floor. Following the plaques' logic, the falling men ultimately become fallen, as represented by the fallen soldier drawn in the illustration below them. It is difficult not to associate the monument's falling men with this illustration of the fallen soldier. While more abstracted in the monument, at certain moments, it is overt. In one detail of the monument a man looks like he is falling because his head faces down, extending the portion of the structure slanting towards the floor (Fig. 5). The man beside him, wearing a helmet, also appears to be falling, but around them are fists facing the opposite direction that makes it seem like someone might be pulling them back up. Considering the overt aesthetic and narrative connections between the monument and the first plaque, I perceived the monument as depicting Soviet soldiers, but not only them. I believed the plaques, to a certain extent, somewhat (rather naively) convincing myself the monument's figures were a combination of those mentioned on all three.

It turns out the first plaque is the only one originally made for *Monument to the Victims of Fascism*. The second plaque's origin is unclear, but I soon found information on the third: "a

memorial tablet to the thirty thousand Jews who died at the Ninth Fort was constructed only in 1991.”<sup>93</sup> In other words, this memorial tablet has nothing to do with the monument it is in front of, but rather is supposed to function as a separate memorial of its own. *Monument to the Victims of Fascism* does not memorialize the Ninth Fort as a site of genocide. According to the original plaque, the monument memorializes the Ninth Fort's "fields," where "Soviet Soldiers perished" between 1941-1944." Perhaps I initially grouped all of the tablets into one (they were beside one another) because mass murders at the site also occurred between 1941-1944.

After anti-cosmopolitanism and during destalinization, state monuments like the Ninth Fort's began popping up throughout the Soviet Union and especially on the western front. These are now best known as Great Patriotic War monuments. Like most of these monuments, *Monument to the Victims of Fascism* is literally monumental, towering over any viewer, and its subject matter is men in uniform. In the aftermath of the Nuremberg Trials, Soviet historians turned their attention to Nazi atrocities that occurred in Soviet territories. Simultaneously, the state opened sites of fascist crimes to the public through the erection of memorials and museums, advertised as excursion destinations for Baltic schoolchildren.<sup>94</sup> A prevalent opinion is that these sites were intended to “overshadow the anti-Communist account.”<sup>95</sup> During the post-1950s period, the construction of a museum and monument began at the Ninth Fort, Ponary Forest, and Salaspils concentration in nearby Riga. The monument in the Ponary forest replaced a grassroots memorial formerly at the site, erected after the war by survivors of the massacre.<sup>96</sup> The anti-communist position the Soviet state hoped to address was not so much opposition from outside the state, but more so to convert anti-Communist Soviets, the majority living in Soviet-annexed territories.

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<sup>93</sup> Mark, “Containing Fascism.”

<sup>94</sup> Mark.

<sup>95</sup> Mark.

<sup>96</sup> Gitelman, “The Soviet Politics of the Holocaust.”

The Baltics experienced the bulk of this initiative due to their non-Jewish citizens' degree of collaboration with Nazi Germany with whom they overwhelmingly aligned in preference to the Soviets. Saulius Sužiedėlis and Šarūnas Liekis point out that the majority of Lithuanians remember the *pokaris*, after-war, 1945-53, as the peak of devastation, with some locales experiencing more fatalities at the hands of the Soviet state after V-E Day than during World War II.<sup>97</sup> Lithuanians could not identify with the “good war” narrative prevalent in America or subscribe to the sacrificial ethos of the Great Patriotic War in the Soviet Union that saw the “Grand Alliance” as liberators.

Some scholars insist on a connection between the Soviet state's production of these large-scale monuments and generating nationalism in the USSR under the banner of anti-Fascism. The only monument in a major city of the former-Soviet Union to explicitly mention or portray Jewish victims is in Minsk, Belarus. And still, in the 1990s, the Minsk Museum of the Great Patriotic War as an institution refused to identify Jewish soldiers by religion or even name.<sup>98</sup> The physical manifestations of this initiative throughout the Soviet Union were to explicitly stress the loss of “Soviet” lives broadly and the Soviet Soldier in particular. Perhaps this intended to unify citizens under a uniform experience of Nazi occupation, manufacturing a sense of nationalism after failure to unite many citizens under the Soviet anti-fascist cause during World War II. Memorializing the Soviet soldier emphasizes their sacrifices to counteract fascism. The Ninth Fort is an example of this kind of monument.

In retrospect, *Monument to the Victims of Fascism* aesthetically gives itself away because of its formal similarities to other Great Patriotic War monuments as well as other World War II

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<sup>97</sup> Saulius Sužiedėlis and Šarūnas Liekis, “Conflicting Memories: The Reception of the Holocaust in Lithuania,” in *Bringing the Dark Past to Light*, ed. John-Paul Himka and Joanna Beata Michlic, *The Reception of the Holocaust in Post-communist Europe* (University of Nebraska Press, 2013), 319–51, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1ddr8vf.16>.

<sup>98</sup> Gitelman, “The Soviet Politics of the Holocaust.”

monuments, such as those in former-Yugoslavia. The monument's formal features overwhelmingly suggest a political purpose. Eastern European nations that experienced different post-war trajectories, such as those which make up former-Yugoslavia, also had a commemorative culture entranced in anti-fascist rhetoric and imagery. Yugoslavia's World War II monuments, *spomeniks*, have only recently been interrogated by MOMA in their exhibition and partner publication, *Toward a Concrete Utopia: Architecture in Yugoslavia: 1948-1980*. MOMA's research attributes Yugoslavian monuments to the state's post-war sociopolitical interests and desire for a culture of remembrance that unified the Yugoslav people under a nearly uniform "anti-fascist resistance."<sup>99</sup> For example, there is an uncanny formal resemblance between *Monument to the Victims of Fascism* and the *Battle of Sutjeska Memorial Monument Complex in the Valley of the Heroes* (Fig. 6). Both monuments consist of more than one massive, angular structure made of reinforced concrete and required a sculptor and multiple architects.<sup>100</sup> They both attempt to memorialize soldiers in-situ through monumental structures at remote locations. Like *Monument to the Victims of Fascism*, plans for the *Battle of Sutjeska Memorial Monument* began in the 1960s, but it was not erected until 1971 (though the Ninth Fort monument took longer to build).<sup>101</sup> They are so aesthetically similar, even though the Ninth Fort contains figures, that "The Spomenik Database" claims *Battle of Sutjeska Memorial Monument* "inspired" the Ninth Fort monument in Kaunas without a source.<sup>102</sup>

The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia commissioned monuments of this period similar to Soviet World War II Monuments, such as the *Battle of Sutjeska Memorial Monument*. Some of these Yugoslav monuments do not manifest ethnic erasure, but often project political

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<sup>99</sup> Horvatinčić, "Memorial Sculpture and Architecture in Socialist Yugoslavia."

<sup>100</sup> Horvatinčić.

<sup>101</sup> Horvatinčić.

<sup>102</sup> "Spomenik Database | Sutjeska Memorial at Tjentište," spomenik database, accessed May 2, 2020, <https://www.spomenikdatabase.org/tjentiste>.

ideology much like contemporary Soviet monuments.<sup>103</sup> An early manifestation of the Yugoslavian monument project from the 1950s, Bogdan Bogdanovic's *Memorial to the Jewish Victims of Fascism* uses "traditional funerary typology" to honor Serbia's Jews (Fig. 7).<sup>104</sup> Soviet state monuments of this period never incorporate Jewish iconography in this way, even at sites of Jewish genocide (as evidenced by *Monument to the Victims of Fascism*). Bogdanovic went on to make over twenty monuments, all without denotation of political ideology. This is exceptional in Soviet and most other Yugoslav monuments of the period.<sup>105</sup> MOMA significantly notes that the push for such monuments largely came from the people. Unlike the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia did not silence grassroots sites of remembrance, these are among the tens of thousands of memorials throughout former-Yugoslavia. Stalinist Russia is an especially unique case in the second half of the twentieth-century because the regime "smashed civil society to a point that it could not sustain commemorative activity independent of the party and the state."<sup>106</sup> Hence grassroots sites of remembrance in the USSR are located on the periphery.

Most Great Patriotic War monuments, following the Nuremberg trials, appear well after World War II. This is especially so, considering state monuments often take years to construct. For example, plans for *Monument to the Victims of Fascism* began in 1966, but was not completed until 1984 and displayed to the public until 1985 when it received the USSR State Prize and USSR Architects Union Prize (Fig. 8).<sup>107</sup> These monuments' distance from the period they memorialize led me to ask how the Jewish population themselves mourned genocide and mass murder? All of the discrepancies above, which produced this question, led me to folk

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<sup>103</sup> Horvatinčić, "Memorial Sculpture and Architecture in Socialist Yugoslavia."

<sup>104</sup> Horvatinčić.

<sup>105</sup> Horvatinčić.

<sup>106</sup> Jay Winter, "Sites of Memory," in *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debate*, ed. Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz (Fordham University, 2010), 312–24, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1c999bq.25>.

<sup>107</sup> "The Museum," Kaunas IX Fort Museum, accessed May 2, 2020, <https://www.9fortomuziejus.lt/istorija/muziejus/?lang=en>.

memorials. The forms of folk memorials discussed throughout this project are constructed right after the war, before the state started making monuments to the period.

Folk memorials exhibit a contrasting monumentality to the state-driven monumentality described above. State monumentality is often expressed through a conception of physical monumentality that is simultaneously enduring and massive. Folk memorials conceive of monumentality differently. These memorials use materiality in an opposing manner and never rely on scale. They are small and rarely permanent—often temporal. They rarely denote political ideology, although their existence is politicized. Folk memorials reveal that monumentality adapts according to their purpose.

The folk memorial hopes to function as a source of lamentation of the physical bodies buried at its site. Hence, they are always in-situ. Folk monumentality is engaged in marking the literal grave. Sometimes folk memorials accomplish this literally, through fences or borders, but regardless, through scale and site. Monumental size cannot achieve this precision of marking. Folk memorials, always small, are installed at a burial site for a symbolic and functional purpose. Their time of creation is precious because they address burial rites. That is why many folk memorials start to appear before the state's monuments. That being said, folk memorials are built and visited long after the war. Because many do not physically exist anymore, these memorials preserve the mourning of these deceased in other forms—the photograph, in particular. These photographic mementos generate lamentation that resembles and maintains the intimate experience of the physical folk memorials they depict.

*Conclusions: Figures*



Fig. 1. Alfonsas Vincentas Ambraziūnas, *Monument to the Victim of Fascism*, 1966-1984, reinforced concrete, IX Fort, Kaunas, Lithuania, <http://www.alfonsasambraziunas.lt/sort/paminklai/>.





Fig. 2. Original plaque for the Monument to the Victims of Fascism, 1984, Kaunas, Lithuania, 2019 (Photograph by Gabriella Goldberg)

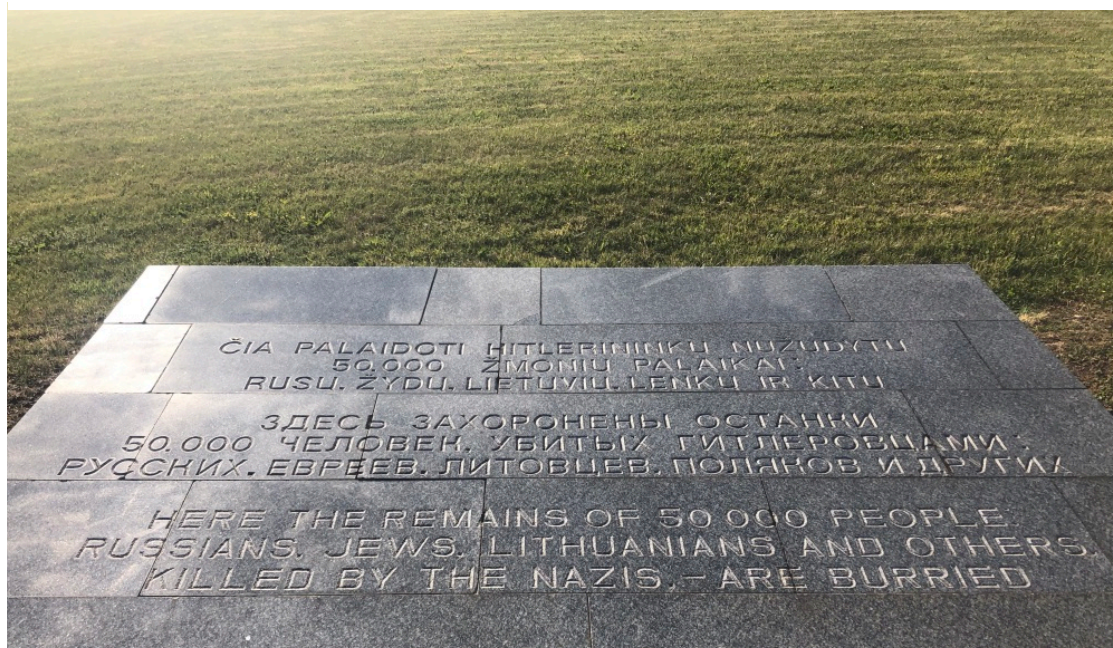


Fig. 3. Memorial tablet at the Monument to the Victims of Fascism, (date unknown), Kaunas, Lithuania, 2019 (Photograph by Gabriella Goldberg)





Fig. 4. Memorial to the thirty thousand Jews who died at the Ninth Fort, 1991, Kaunas, Lithuania, 2019 (Photography by Gabriella Goldberg)



Fig. 5. Alfonsas Vincentas Ambraziūnas, *Monument to the Victims of Fascism*, reinforced concrete, (Flickr), <https://www.flickr.com/photos/lithuania2008/2651547522/in/photostream/>.



Fig. 6. Miodrag Živković and Đorđe Zloković, *Monument to the Battle of the Sutjeska*, 1971, Tjentište, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Photo by Valentin Jeck, commissioned by the Museum of Modern Art, New York (2016).



Fig. 7. Bogdan Bogdanović, *Memorial to the Jewish Victims of Fascism*, 1952, Belgrade, Serbia. Photo by Marc Schneider (2008), <https://www.memorialmuseums.org/eng/denkmaeler/view/1299/Memorial-to-the-Victims-of-Nazism-at-the-Jewish-Cemetery-of-Belgrade>.





Fig. 8. Opening ceremony of Monument to the Victims of Fascism at the Ninth Fort, 1984, archive photograph, (IX Fort Museum), <https://www.15min.lt/media-pasakojimai/ix-fortas-608>.

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